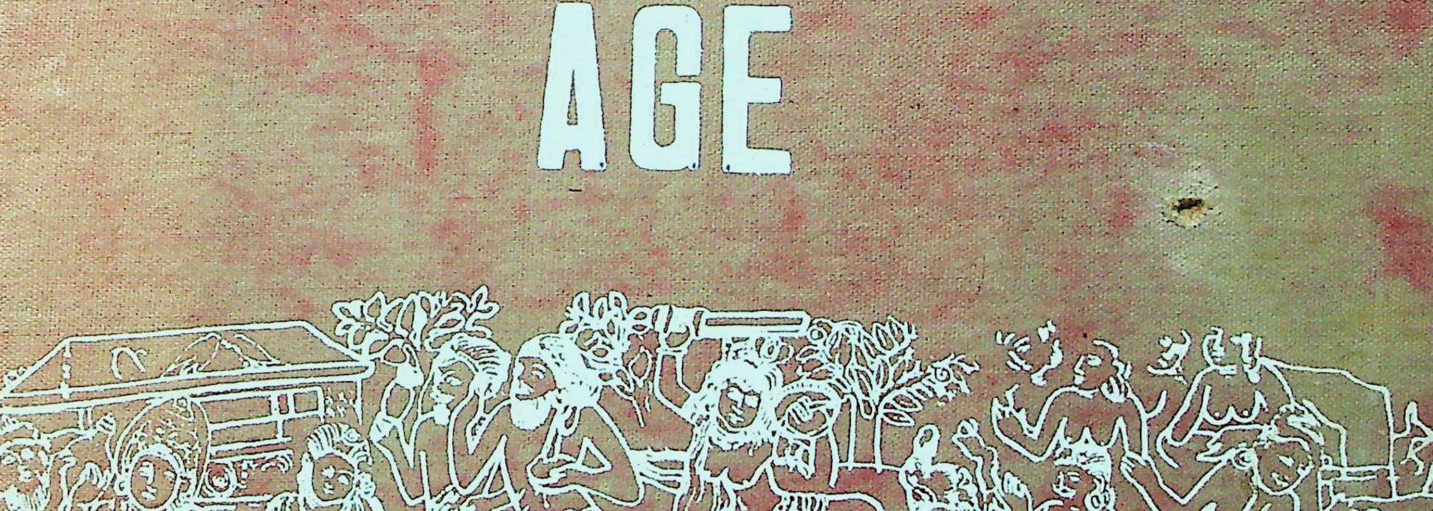
Dr. S. N. VYAS

INDIA IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA AGE



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INDIA IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA AGE

INDIA IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA

With 126 Illustrations and one Map

By

SHANTIKUMAR NANOORAM VYAS,

M.A., Ph.D.

A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS IN ANCIENT INDIA AS DESCRIBED IN VĀLMĪKI'S RĀMĀYANA

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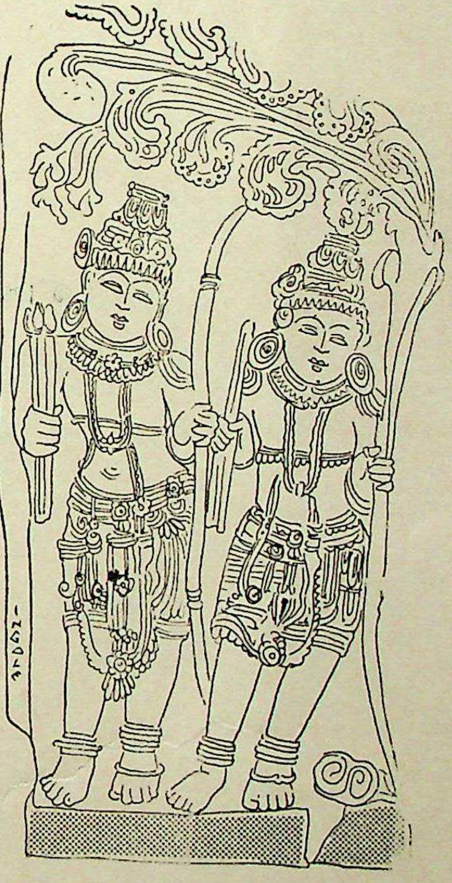

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In memoriam mei fratris senioris

Madanmohan N. Vyas, B. Com. (Bom.)

1919-1941

PREFACE

The culture of the Rāmāyaṇa has been a popular subject with the preachers and protagonists of Hinduism, and there is no dearth of books and papers on the glory of Rāma, his superhuman conduct and character and on the moral grandeur of the epic. The object of the present study, however, is to bring out in a critical and analytical way those facts from Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa—the fountain-head of the vast Rāma-literature—which have had bearing on the culture and civilization of India down the ages. Effort has been made to include as many topics as possible which should facilitate a proper understanding of the moral, social and material aspects of the Indian way of life in the Rāmāyaṇa age. An objective study is what has been aimed at. A study along these lines and on the scale attempted here has, perhaps, never been made before. That is my apology for presenting the work to the public.

The scope and limitations of the present study have been indicated in the introductory chapter. Questions as to the historicity of Rāma, the date of the Rāmāyaṇa, the nature of its authorship, single or multiple, the various forms the story has taken, and its genuine and interpolated parts—are actually beyond the scope of this work and could merely be touched upon.

The book is the result of several years' research, comprising the bulk of my thesis approved by the Agra University (India) for Doctorate in Philosophy. The thesis has, however, been thoroughly revised, abridged and enlarged at places, and pruned of its academicalities with a view to making the book interesting and intelligible to the general reader. It aims at rousing popular—not merely academic or scholastic—interest in the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa by presenting a novel analysis of the age-old epic, the study of which came to be neglected with the decadence of Sanskrit. I believe such a study will also be instrumental in spotlighting India's cultural eminence without making it cumbersome or incredible to rational thinking.

Liberal use has been made of the actual words of the epic. Reference to the context with regard to almost every fact culled from the Rāmāyaṇa has been given, so that those familiar with the epic story will find no difficulty in following this analysis of its culture. A general outline of the Rāmāyaṇa story has also been given at the outset which should prove helpful to those readers who are not already familiar with it.

Necessary references to the canto and verse have been given; and for the transliteration of Sanskrit names and words, the standard system of diacritical marks has been followed.

For purposes of reference, the seven main parts of the Rāmāyaṇa are denoted in Roman figures as follows : Bālakāṇḍa—I, Ayodhyākāṇḍa—II, Araṇyakāṇḍa—III, Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa—IV, Sundarakāṇḍa—V, Yuddhakāṇḍa—VI and Uttarakāṇḍa—VII; while the canto (*sarga*) and verse (*śloka*) have been indicated in Hindu-Arabic figures (*e.g.*, II. 77. 93, meaning the 93rd verse of the 77th canto of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa). The edition on which this study is based is the one published in seven volumes by the Gujarati Press, Bombay, with the three commentaries, Tilaka, Śiromaṇi and Bhūṣaṇa (1912-20) ; the reader may however consult the popular Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Vikramī Saṁvat 2017).

It is likely that, as the reader progresses, he may find repeated mention of some events. But, in an analytical work like the present one, some repetitions are unavoidable ; for, the same fact or statement may lend itself to interpretation in different contexts from different points of view.

I am indebted to my professor, the late Pandit Chandrashekhar Pande, ex-Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Sanatana Dharma College, Kanpur, who first suggested to me the present subject for methodical research. It is unfortunate that he passed away in September, 1949, and did not live to see this work completed. I am obliged to Dr. D. N. Shastri, former Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Meerut College, Meerut, for his invaluable guidance in further improving the dissertation. I feel grateful to Dr. Raj Bali Pandeya, the then Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture, and now at Jabalpur, who in 1945 very warmly recommended my synopsis of the projected research at the Agra University—which was for me the much awaited green signal to go ahead.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Dwarkanath Munshi, Mr. S. Das and Mr. Lajpat Rai for helping me through the manuscript. I am especially grateful to my friend Mr. Indukanta Shukla, English Department, Hindu College, Delhi University, for his painstaking and multiple labour of love all along through its preparation. I am also thankful to Mr. R. L. Chopra of the Hindustan Times, New Delhi, for going through the proofs exhaustively and rendering all possible help in the printing of this book. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my debt to the many books on ancient Indian culture, which have touched upon certain cultural aspects of the Rāmāyaṇa, especially to the writings of Dr. Miss P. C. Dharmā, Dr. S. C. Sarkar, Mr. C. V. Vaidya, Mr. C. Sivaramamurti; and many others, individual reference to each one of whom may not have been made at every place in the body of the book.

Thanks are due to several institutions and eminent individual artists and scholars of India for their permission to include here reproductions of works by them or in their possession.

Some parts of this work were published in an abridged form in a series of eight articles in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, in March-April, 1956.

The illustrations included in this book have been collected from various sources listed in detail in Appendix B.

J/105, South Extension-I,
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January 1, 1967

S. N. Vyas

Method of Transliteration

i. आ *ā*, ई *ī*, ऊ *ū*, ऋ *ṛ*, ऐ *ai*, औ *au*, (ं) *ṁ*, (:) *ḥ*.

ii. ङ् *ṅ*.

च् c, छ् ch, ञ् *ñ*.

ट् *ṭ*, ठ् *ṭh*, ड् *ḍ*, ढ् *ḍh*, ण् *ṇ*.

iii. श् *ś*, ष् *ṣ*.

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1

VĀLMĪKI AND HIS EPIC

The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, the first national epic of India, embodying the living traditions, aptitudes, ideas, myths and symbols of a hoary epoch, is invaluable as a repository of ancient Indian culture and civilization. It is a watch-tower that commands a vivid and realistic view of the social, economic, religious, political and aesthetic aspirations and achievements of Aryans living several thousand years ago, and throws light on many an obscure side of the then Indian society, furnishing facts and circumstances hardly available from any other source. Its importance as a source for the reconstruction of the cultural history of post-Vedic India is further enhanced by the fact that, unlike the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, it is intimately linked with the present religious faith of millions in India. The exalted veneration in which the epic has been held down the ages to this day has, however, been largely responsible

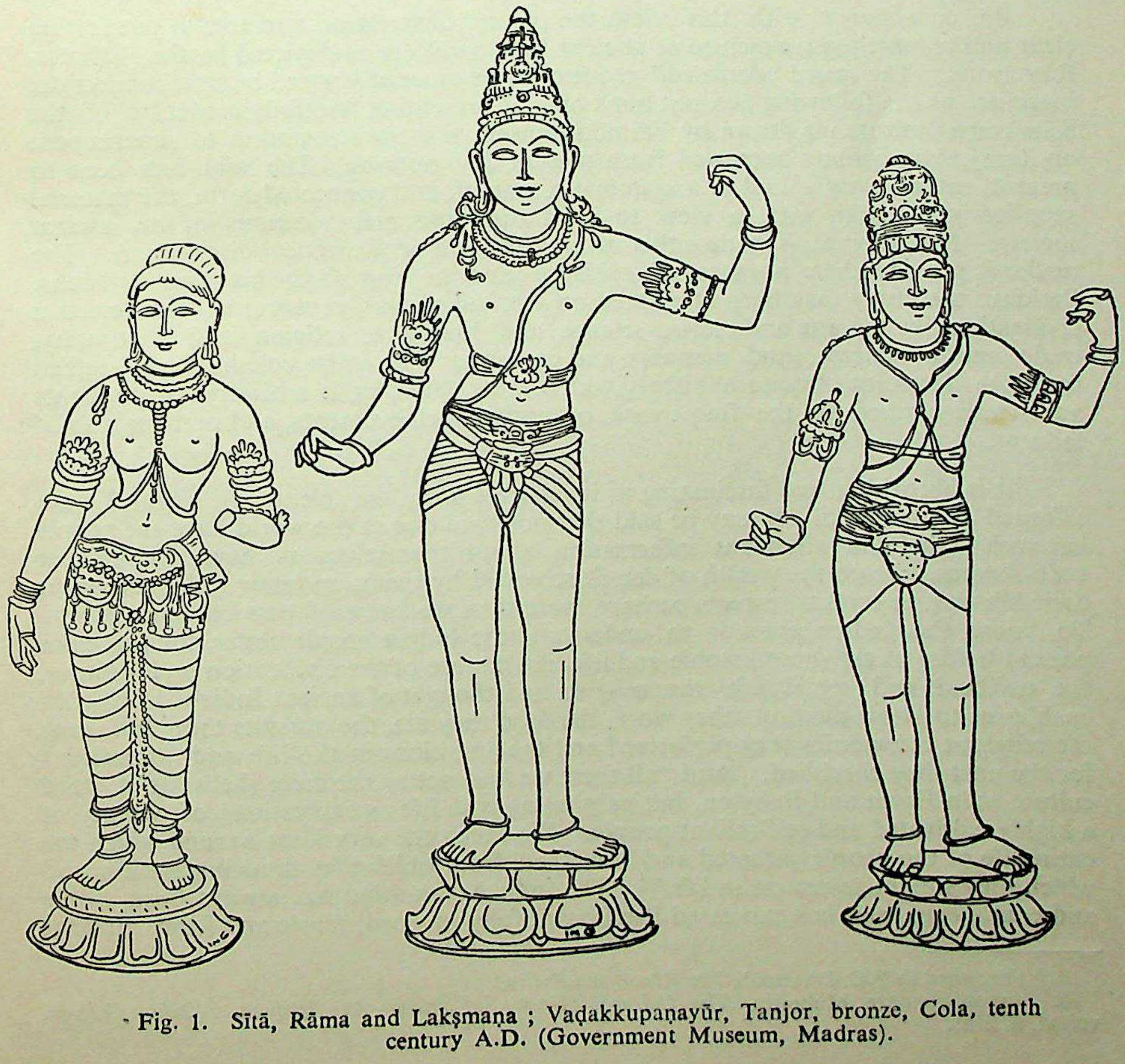

Fig. 1. Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa ; Vaḍakkupaṇayūr, Tanjor, bronze, Cola, tenth century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

for the neglect of its critical study from the cultural standpoint. The orthodox Hindu adores the hero and heroine of the Rāmāyaṇa as gods incarnate and deems it nothing short of sacrilege to scan and dissect their life themes, "too sacred for babblement and profane mouthing." This attitude is discernible in most commentators on the Rāmāyaṇa who try to explain its intricacies mostly in a reverential and non-critical spirit, prepossessed as they are with the notion of the semi-divine character of the origin and content of the epic.

Moreover, the great popularity which the story of the Rāmāyaṇa has enjoyed for ages has led to the diversion of thought from, and underestimation of, its wealth of cultural suggestions. To quote the late V.S. Srinivasa Sastri : "The ordinary reader of the Rāmāyaṇa feels edified by the subject and is carried away by the entrancing story. He does not pause to note the numerous references, scattered on every page, to the social and political conditions of the times. These references are mostly hints which require patient co-ordination and reflection for a full understanding. When a conscientious and discriminating researcher puts these hints together and gives more or less a coherent picture of our ancient civilization, the result is a rich measure of the joy of discovery."[1]

In consonance with this view, the present dissertation attempts to put forth a clear and comprehensive picture of ancient Indian culture as depicted in the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. The word "depicted" requires to be especially noted in this connection, inasmuch as the following account aims only at presenting faithfully a picture of the Rāmāyaṇa culture as drawn by Vālmīki himself, without attempting to superimpose on it any extra colours borrowed from present-day notions. The aim has been to present rather simply and in a systematic, smooth and connected form, the material supplied by Vālmīki, with a view to illustrating the main features of an ancient society. No attempt is made either at moralization or theoretical disquisition. The reader is provided here a mass of evidence and he can form his own opinions. Besides, the study has been attempted on a broad canvas, covering all that depicts a civilization like the arts and crafts, science and literature, religion and philosophy, trade and commerce, and manners and customs. The entire epic has been studied from the viewpoint of cultural history which, truly speaking, is a history of thoughts and ideas clothed in the framework of positive achievements, and perhaps also of failures.

It is absorbing and fascinating to investigate into the plenteous cultural data afforded by Vālmīki. It may be said that nowhere else in the world have the people left such varied and abundant information about themselves as have the ancient Indo-Aryans. From the wealth of details recorded by them, we know intimately what their life was, in certain respects perhaps more than we know of our contemporaries. To know the Indian epics is to understand the Indian people better, for the epics present before us the most graphic and life-like picture of the civilization and culture, the political and social life, the religion and thought of ancient Indians. Vālmīki enables us to know the dress they wore, the food they ate, the pursuits they followed, the religious ceremonies they performed and the ambitions in this life and aspirations for the next they cherished. And "all these we find not as the mere shells of a dead culture as in Egypt and Babylon, but palpitating with life as expressions of vitality of a highly cultivated and self-reliant people. We touch the very ideas around which the entire life of the people gathered and flourished, from which they drew inspiration and which they sought to realize in life."[2] The Indo-Aryan mind has always been noble and courageous, and has expressed itself beautifully in word, music and form, and "it would need a great scholar and a greater artist to reconstruct the world which lies fragmentarily scattered in the great epics of India."[1]

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[1] Foreword to P.C. Dharmā's *The Rāmāyaṇa Polity*.

[2] Subodhchandra Mukerji : *The Cultural History af India—An Apology*. (*Indian Culture*, vol. vi, p. 218).

A study of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa from the cultural aspect is of more than mere academic significance. The epic has exerted a profound influence in moulding India's culture through the ages. Thus, the Rāmāyaṇa rightly is the backbone and vertebral column of Aryan civilization. The Indian's conception of a millennium is *Rāma-rājya*—a word that has become synonymous in popular parlance with a benign and happy society. And yet, paradoxically enough, the vast majority of Indians know little about the Rāma-rājya period. This book, it is hoped, will be helpful in that it attempts to paint a clear and well-defined picture of Rāma-rājya by presenting in an objective manner the everyday life of man in that ancient society, bringing to light facts, some of which are unknown or only vaguely conceived today. This close study of the Rāmāyaṇa from the moral, cultural and social aspects will facilitate proper understanding of India's glorious cultural heritage. The book should be able to remove some of the obscure, prejudiced or preconceived notions about ancient Indian culture and endow with a unity and purpose our inchoate conception of a type of society which has all along served as a model of perfection for posterity to attain.

To an antiquarian and the student of oriental literature and manners, knowledge of the Rāmāyaṇa culture is indispensable. Together with the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas, the Rāmāyaṇa constitutes a veritable storehouse of the wisdom and learning of ancient Indians. It is an authentic record of the various aspects of Aryan civilization evolved at a very early period of history. Scholars go to the length of asserting that "there is not a single phase of human life which is not to be found reflected and not a single corresponding theory which is not to be found anticipated in the Rāmāyaṇa."[2] Indeed, as M.N. Dutt, the talented translator of the Rāmāyaṇa, suggests, the adage current in our society with regard to the *Mahābhārata*—"What is not in *Bhārata* (*Mahābhārata*) is not in Bhārata (India)" applies to the Rāmāyaṇa as well. "In it cosmogony and theogony, the genealogy of kings and princes, human and extra human beings, Asuras and Dānavas, Yakṣas and Gandharvas, Siddhas and Cāraṇas, folk-lore, anecdotes and legends, stories half-mythical and half-historical, descriptions of cities existing at a period long anterior to the age of Troy and Memphis, and the chronicles of kings that reigned long before Priarn and Busiris—all these with others too numerous to enumerate have been woven into the mighty web and woof of the magic drapery evolved by the so potent art of Vālmīki."[3]

The Rāmāyaṇa has been accepted as a homogeneous work attributed to a single author, Vālmīki. Some account of his life can be gleaned from the first and last Books of the epic.[4] In the Bālakāṇḍa, he is introduced as a gifted saint who lived with Bharadvāja and other pupils in the solitude of a beautiful hermitage in the sequestered valley of the Tamasā. He received from Nārada the outline of the Rāma-story, representing Rāma as an ideal man, endowed with all the qualities of head and heart (I.1). After his bath in the Tamasā, he chanced to see a fond pair of birds at play with each other. Suddenly, the male was shot at by a hunter and the consequent grief of the female made Vālmīki involuntarily burst forth into a poetic utterance,[1] a pronouncement of curse on the wicked murderer. Returning to his cottage, the saint brooded over the pathetic incident and mused on the *śloka* (verse) that had expressed his *śoka* (shock of grief, I. 2-40). At this psychological moment poetic vision dawned upon him. The requisite inspiration came from Brahmā, the "lord of creation," urging him to convey the truth and pointing out the Rāma-story as the proper vehicle (I. 2. 31-2). Accordingly, he weaved in the *śloka* metre the instructive narrative of the Rāmāyaṇa, which he taught to the twins Kuśa and Lava, a princely pair of graceful voice. These were the first rhapsodists (*kuśīlavas*) to whom he entrusted the task of reciting his heroic song "in tranquil shades where sages throng, where the good resort, in lowly home and royal court" (I. 4. 13). They carried out their task to the satisfaction of their master and won laurels from the hermits and the townsmen alike by their enchanting recitation in strains rivalling the notes of a *vīṇā*.

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[1] 1. Nagendranath Ghose : *The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, A Sociological Study.* (*Sir Asutosh Mukerji Silver Jubilee Volumes*, vol. iii, *Orientalia*, pt. ii, p. 361).

[2] 2. C. N. Zutshi : *Aspects of Aryan Civilization as Depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Proceedings of IV Oriental Conference*, p. 20).

[3] 3. M.N. Dutt : Introduction to his translation of the Rāmāyaṇa.

[4] 4. See B. Barua : *Vālmīki as he reveals himself in his poem* (*Sir Asutosh Mukerji Silver Jubilee Volumes*, vol. iii, *Orientalia*, part i, pp. 391-414) ; C. Bulcke : *About Vālmīki* (*Journal of the Oriental Institute*, vol. iii, pt. 2, pp. 121-131).

In the Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, during their forest rambles, are shown to have met Vālmīki in his hermitage near Citrakūṭa (II. 56.16-7).

The Uttarakāṇḍa records Vālmīki as a fast friend of Daśartha who received with a fatherly affection the forsaken Sita in his hermitage. There the hapless lady gave birth to the twins Kuśa and Lava, who were brought up under the care of the saint himself. They were trained to recite the Rāmāyaṇa, and when Rāma performed the Aśvamedha sacrifice, Vālmīki, accompanied by the twin rhapsodists, visited Ayodhyā, where the princely bards drew the tears of the court by reciting the luckless fate of their mother. Vālmīki testified to the spotless purity of Sītā's character and asked Rāma to reaccept her as his consort.

The Rāmāyaṇa does not contain any information regarding the early life of Vālmīki. That he was a robber turned ascetic is referred to in other works. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* describes him as a Brāhmaṇa youth who, associating with foresters and dacoits, took to devious ways and lived by highway robbery. Once he tried to lay hands on the seven sages who chanced to come his way. The sages, however, successfully expostulated with him and put to him the crucial question whether his wife and children whom he supported by this ignominious profession were prepared to share his sin. The Brāhmaṇa went home and put the question to his people who replied that they would share only his wealth and not his sin. This kindled the spark of spirituality in the dacoit's heart and he went back to the seven sages for solace and guidance. The sages advised him to mutter the holy name Rāma even if it be in a reversed order (Marā). The Brāhmaṇa remained absorbed in the inaudible repetition of this name, oblivious of his surroundings, so much so that his body in course of time became beset with ant-hills (*valmīka*). After a long time when the seven sages returned that way, they fitly renamed him Vālmīki and congratulated him on his regeneration.[2]

In popular tradition, Vālmīki as a youth is named Ratnākara and he is confronted by Nārada instead of by the seven sages. The Bengali Rāmāyaṇa of Kṛttivāsa utilizes that tradition ; the rest of the story is akin to that of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Mahābhārata*, too, hints at Vālmīki being originally a robber.[3]

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[1] I. 2. 15, which Griffith renders as :

> No fame be thine for endless time,
> Because, base outcast, of thy crime,
> Whose cruel hand was fain to slay
> One of this gentle pair at play.

[2] It is not unreasonable to suppose that this story contains some historical truth. After the development of *Rāma-bhakti*, it was modified in such a way as to illustrate the saving grace of the name of Rāma (C. Bulcke : *Ibid*, p. 131).

[3] Aranya-parva, 122; Anuśāsana-parva, 49.

The authenticity of this material on the life of Vālmīki is not beyond question. The story of the conversion of a robber is intended more to underline the chastening influence of the name Rāma. The fanciful derivation of the name Vālmīki from *valmīka* or ant-hill stresses the rigid austerity observed by the sage.[1] The references to him in the Rāmāyaṇa itself are not regarded as authentic. The discourse between Nārada and Vālmīki in the opening chapter of the epic and the episode of *krauñca-vadha* are clearly not from Vālmīki. The meeting between Vālmīki and Rāma near Citrakūṭa is found only in the southern recension of the epic. Modern scholars do not accept Vālmīki as a contemporary of Rāma ;[2] and the belief that he composed the Rāmāyaṇa thousands of years before the advent of Rāma hardly stands to reason. The great popularity of Rāmāyaṇa seems to have thrown a halo round its author. By the time the Bālakāṇḍa came into being, in the first century B.C., he came to be looked upon as a great sage, a contemporary of Rāma who lived in an *āśrama* close to the Tamasā and Gaṅgā rivers. A couple of centuries later, when the Uttarakāṇḍa was taking shape, Vālmīki was brought into much close relationship with the royal house of Ayodhyā, being said to be a friend of Daśaratha.[3]

The fact, however, that Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa is closest to Rāma's reign in point of time is undisputed. In composing his chronicle, the poet naturally had access to the popular traditions, myths, legends and sayings handed down from the age of Rāma, which invest his work with a historical significance denied to other Rāmāyaṇas.

The impression that we get of Vālmīki after a study of the epic is sufficient to relegate to the background all his questionable antecedents ; in fact, the reader is so engrossed in the narrative that he is hardly curious to know the past of the poet. Vālmīki appears before him as an eminent saint-poet, versed in India's ancient lore, a well-travelled man familiar with the geography of his country,[4] an interpreter and establisher of social usages and customs, an upholder of truth and justice, a bastion of *dharma* and a staunch advocate of pacification. By singing the saga of an ideal king, who captured the imagination of the Indian people down the ages, in the compass of an epic poem of stirring vitality, he not only immortalized a golden epoch in the annals of ancient India but also secured for himself a place of lasting glory in the galaxy of world poets.[5]

It is worthy of note that while the other Rāmāyaṇas treat Rāma more as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa emphasizes mainly the human side of his personality. When the poet enquired of Nārada about a figure crowned with ideal qualities, the latter proceeded to describe a *man* as the receptacle of them all (I. 1.7). In spite of the unavoidable influence of the existing ballads deifying Rāma, Vālmīki's standpoint was pre-eminently human.[6] For him Rāma was a great human being, perhaps the greatest of all, "a moon among men" (*nara-candramā*), who never swerved from the path of virtue in the most trying circumstances ; nay, who, by rising above human infirmities, raised man to the level of God. This robust outlook has invested Vālmīki's work with an appeal all its own.

From time to time considerable additional matter has crept into the Rāmāyaṇa by way of interpolations, some of it added by clever poets and some by lesser Sanskrit scholars. These interpolations were considered good and useful in those

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1. B. Barua : *Ibid*, pp. 398-9.
2. Vālmīki lived somewhere at the turn of the fourth century B.C. (C. Bulcke : *Ibid*).
3. C. Bulcke : *Ibid*.
4. He must have travelled much in northern India, but he had, definitely, no first-hand knowledge of the central or southern parts of India (C. Bulcke : *Ibid*).
5. *Śārṅgadhara-paddhati*, 166.
6. B. Barua : *Ibid*, p. 401.

days by men who desired to propagate some ideas of their own or who thought that the original epic could be made more beautiful and fuller in detail in certain parts. The fact that in the earlier stages the poem circulated orally and later there were only a few hand-written copies available in the country, and that there were no means of easily verifying the authenticity, assisted this process. Little did these interpolators feel that they were deceiving anybody, because they held they propagated sound ideas. The larger the text became the greater was the respect shown by earnest students, for it was the popular opinion that the original text was very big and that many parts had been lost. Many people came forward to supply "re-discovered" portions. Doubtless, these portions also contain useful material, but they essentially belong to different periods and not to the time of Vālmīki.

When the Rāmāyaṇa was reduced to writing, all its various renderings, interpolations and the order of its verses were noted down in same sequence in which the wandering minstrels of different regions narrated it to enthralled listeners. Consequently, several versions of the text gained currency in different parts of the country, each preserving its own peculiarities. Of these, three recensions are important, namely, the North-western, the Bengal and the Bombay or Southern which differ from one another to such an extent that about one-third of the verses in each are not found in either of the other two.[1] On the bases of these versions, several editions of the Rāmayaṇa have been published during the last 150 years.[2] The first edition, including only the first two Books with English translation, was published during 1806-10 by Dr. William Carey and Dr. Joshua Marshman, two missionaries of Serampore (Bengal). The text herein seems to have been based on the North-western recension of the epic. The second attempt was by Dr. A. G. Schlegel who published, during 1829-38, the first two Books with Latin translation, critical annotations and an introduction. The first complete edition of the Rāmāyaṇa was, however, published during 1847-67, with King Charles Albert's assistance, by the Italian scholar Signor Gespare Gorresio, basing the text on the one prevalent in Bengal. Thereafter the Sanskrit text was repeatedly published in Bombay, Madras, Kumbhakonam and Srirangam, representing the Southern (identical with Bombay) version of the epic. The Lahore edition of the Rāmāyaṇa (1923-47) is said to represent the North-western recension.

In the absence of a critical edition of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Vulgate recension[3] of the text had to be taken as the basis of this study. Yet, endeavour has been made to exclude such portions as are flagrant interpolations. For instance, the seventh Book, the Uttarakāṇḍa, which has almost universally been admitted as a later addition to the original text, has generally been excluded from the purview of the present work, inasmuch as the state of culture as reflected in that Book cannot be the same as that depicted in the other genuine parts.[4] As for the first Book, the Bālakāṇḍa, the portions embodying the main thread of the story have been utilized, while the large mass of legendary material has been ignored as later accretion. Even in the original five Books (II—VI), the chapters generally accepted as interpolated (*prakṣipta*) by the commentators have been omitted. It is only occasionally, by way of comparison or contrast, that some interesting information from these dubious portions has been drawn and in every such case the reference has been clearly indicated. Notwithstanding this, it is likely that a few conclusions may have been drawn on the basis of such material which some scholars may not regard as genuine. This, however, could not be helped, as a critical edition of the Rāmāyaṇa, after collating the extant recensions, is yet to be published, and the present study, with its obviously limited scope, could not undertake an investigation into its original and interpolated parts.[1]

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[1] A.A. Macdonell : *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 308.

[2] See *Prospectus of the Critical and Illustrated Edition of the Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 2-4.

[3] *Viz.*, the Bombay edition which contains mostly the oldest version of the epic and is the one most widely used (A.A. Macdonell : *Ibid*, p. 303).

[4] However, Indian tradition has all along accepted this seventh Book as a genuine portion of Vālmīki's work (P.P.S. Sastri : *The Rāmāyaṇa, Krishnaswamy Aiyangar Com. Vol.*, pp. 32 ff). Researches of Indian scholars have shown that the whole of the Uttarakāṇḍa is not interpolated (*Sahyādri* vol. iv, pp. 532-5) and that it is far from being unhistorical (M.V. Kibe :. *Is the Uttarakāṇḍa of Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa unhistorical* ? (*Journal of Indian History*, vol. xx, pp. 28-34). It contains real ancient history, not available from any other source, and preserves facts which are being corroborated by measurement and archaeological excavations (*ibid*). Besides, the Uttarakāṇḍa is earlier than Kālidāsa who narrates its contents in his *Raghuvamśa*. There is ample evidence to show that Kālidāsa considered the Uttarakāṇḍa as a genuine part of Vālmīki's work. The cantos describing the banishment of Sītā in the Uttarakāṇḍa and the *Raghuvamśa* have many parallels (V. Raghavan : *Vālmīki and Kālidāsa, K.V. Rangaswami Aiyangar Com. Vol.*, pp. 421-4). No less important is the fact that the entire Rāmāyaṇa, in the form in which we have it with the Uttarakāṇḍa and all, was known in Campā (ancient Indo-China) in the second century A.D., which proves that the seventh Book was composed in the land of its nativity long before the commencement of the Christian era, to enable its transmission by slow degrees to the shores of Greater India (K.A. Nilakantha Sastri : *Rāmāyaṇa in Greater India, Journal of Oriental Research*, vol. vi, p. 115).

Scholars are not unanimous in their estimate of the date of Rāmayaṇa. Jacobi holds that the original Rāmāyaṇa (*i.e.*, Books II—VI) may belong to the sixth or eighth century B.C. Macdonell[2] has argued that the kernel of the Rāmāyaṇa was composed before 500 B.C., while the more recent portions were probably not added till the second century B.C. and later. Winternitz[3] opines that the original Rāmāyaṇa was composed by Vālmīki in the third century B.C. on the basis of ancient ballads, while it attained its present extent and contents towards the close of the second century A.D. According to Keith,[4] there is no reason to go below 300 B.C. for the kernel of the Rāmāyaṇa,while with regard to the final date of the composition the Rāmāyaṇa including the first and seventh Books, general possibilities suggest that second century B.C. saw most of the work completed. However, nothing can be said conclusively about the date.

As for the period of the events of the Rāmāyaṇa, Pargiter,[5] according to calculations based upon genealogical data, concludes that there is a gap of five centuries between the dates of the Rāmāyaṇa and Bhārata wars. According to him, Rāma lived in the fifth century before the war of the *Mahābhārata* which took place in 1100 B.C. Rāma, according to him, thus ruled about 1600 B.C. Even this date of Rāma's reign is a tentative calculation, and calls for deeper research. However, now that the tendency of Occidental Sanskritists is to stretch the limits of the Vedic age much further back than what they were inclined to do at the outset of Indological research, the age of Rāma as well as the date of the Rāmāyaṇa will naturally be pushed back far beyond 800-600 B.C., as held by Jacobi.

The abundance of *ārṣa* (archaic) forms in the epic is an indication of its high antiquity ; for, after the rise of the grammarians no writer of whatever pretensions could have taken that amount of freedom with the language.[6] The antiquity of the poem is further proved by the numerous variant readings which abound in it and which could have arisen only from its hoary age and its diffusion by many mouths through distant regions. Indeed, in reading the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, one cannot but feel the presence of an antique air pervading the whole.[7] It is probable that a work of such respectable antiquity should have undergone, with the efflux of centuries, changes the cumulative effect of which might not be inconsiderable. But to assign a comparatively later date to the epic by catching hold of a word or a stanza here and there is clearly wrong.[1] The main incidents of the Rāmāyaṇa were familiar to the great intellectuals of the pre-Christian time, such as the author of the *Arthasāstra*, the great dramatist Bhāsa and the grammarian Patañjali.[2]

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[1] A critical edition of the Rāmāyaṇa is under preparation at the Oriental Institute, Baroda.

[2] *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 309.

[3] *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. i, pp. 516-17.

[4] *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1915, p. 318.

[5] *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, chapter XV.

[6] The profane character of the Rāmāyaṇa probably accounts for the absence of any reference to it in the Gṛāhyasūtras or Pānini. But Pānini (500 B.C.) does explain the formation of such names as Kosala, Kausalyā, Kekaya, Kaikeyī, Bharata, Vais'ravana, Rāvaṇa, Vibhīṣana and Vālmīki. But the main characters of the Rāmāyaṇa, *viz.*, Rāma, Sītā and Daśaratha are not mentioned in his grammar.

[7] *Cf.* Griffith : "In such poems as the *Iliad* and the Rāmāyaṇa we instinctively feel that they belong to the earlier world ; we enter them as we enter a house in Pompeii—the colours may still seem fresh and no mark of decay remind us of their age, but we feel that...a gulf of ages lies between us and our objects" (Introduction to his translation of the Rāmāyaṇa, p. 6).

The theory of Weber that the Rāmāyaṇa is posterior to the Buddhist *Das'aratha Jātaka*, that it was composed after the model of Homer and that it was written about the commencement of the Christian era, has long been refuted. Keith[3] has shown that the Buddhist Jātaka is of uncertain date and is without doubt a later attempt to turn the Rāma-story to serve the ends of Buddhism. K.T. Telang wrote a vehement rejoinder in 1873 under the caption: "Was Rāmāyaṇa Copied From Homer?" Winternitz[4] has conclusively shown that there can be no question of any Greek influence on the Rāmāyana, nor are there any traces of Buddhism to be seen in it. Sylvan Levi[5] has proved that even those chapters that Jacobi regards as later additions in the Rāmāyaṇa must certainly be earlier than the Christian era; for, passages in the *Harivaṁs'a* and a Buddhistic Sūtra, which was translated into Chinese at a tolerably early period, are obviously derived from these chapters in the Rāmāyaṇa.

The period of the Upaniṣads must have immediately preceded that of the Rāmāyaṇa; for, their archaic and sometimes dull prose must have created a popular craving for a new type of poetry, and it was the work of Vālmīki that gratified the people. Janaka, the philosopher-king of the Upaniṣads, is a distant predecessor of Janaka II, the father of Sītā. They are separated by the duration of eighteen generations.[6] This indicates that the period of the Rāmāyaṇa is posterior to that of the older Upaniṣads by about 400 years.[7]

There has been some controversy as to whether the story of the Rāmāyaṇa is drawn from historical facts or from a talented poet's imagination. Western scholars do not generally concede any historical basis to the exploits celebrated in the poem.[8] Lassen and, following him, Weber held that the poem was intended to represent allegorically the first attempt of the Aryans of North India to conquer the South. Jacobi thought that the poem was not an allegory but a modernized version of a Vedic myth. Macdonell considered only the first part of the Rāmāyaṇa, extending up to Rāma's exile and his refusal to return and accept the crown at Bharata's entreaties, as having a historical basis, while, according to him, the second part consisting of Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa, Rāma's conflict with

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[1] *E.g.*, *Yavana* (I. 54. 21)—a word which does not necessarily stand for Greeks. (See P. C. Dharmā: *The Date of the Rāmāyaṇa, Educational Review*, July 1945, p. 166); II. 109. 34.

[2] T. Paramasiva Aiyar: *Rāmāyaṇa and Laṅkā*, p. 8.

[3] *The Date of the Rāmāyaṇa* (JRAS, 1915).

[4] *A History of the Indian Literature*, vol. i, pp. 516-7.

[5] *Journal Asiatique*, 1918.

[6] *Cf.* the genealogy of Videha kings (I.71): Videha—Nimi—Mithi (founder of Mithilā)—Janaka I—(11) Haryas'va—(20) Harṣvaromā—(21) Janaka II (father of Sītā).

[7] V.V. Dixit: *Relation of the Epics to the Brāhmanā Literature*, (*Poona Orientalist*, vols. vi and vii).

[8] See B.V. Kamesvar Aiyar: *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa and the Western Critics* (*Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, vol. xvi, no. 4, pp. 240-2).

Rāvaṇa and the recovery of Sītā, may be an allegorical rendering of a Vedic myth. The late R.C. Dutt went further and held that as in the *Māhābharata* so in the Rāmāyaṇa the heroes are myths pure and simple, though, he concedes, the poem throws sidelights on the state of society in ancient India. Savants like Mahātmā Gandhi were apt to regard the entire epic as having evolved out of the poet's imagination with a view to inculcating great moral lessons. Even a cursory reader of the Rāmāyaṇa is led to doubt the historicity of its story by the supernatural element present in it—"the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu and crores of minor gods, curses and boons by gods and ṛṣis, rebirths and transformation of men as beasts and monsters, and the whole paraphernalia of the marvellous, miraculous and monstrous, which are the invariable features and legitimate embellishments of the ancient literature of the whole world at large."[1]

Sanskrit literature has, however, in the main been content to accept the poem as an authentic record of historic events, painted with the poet's mind.[2] The *Rāma-tāpanī Upaniṣad* (*purvā*) gives a brief sketch of Rāma's life and relates the incidents as historical facts. In the Vanaparva (272-91) of the *Māhābhārata*, the sage Mārkaṇḍeya relates the narrative of Rāma's life to Yudhiṣthira to illustrate how great and good men before him had lived and suffered on earth for the sake of truth. The narrative would have no force if it were not believed to be historical. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyana* gives the life of Rāma as a historical figure before proceeding to show how the incidents of his life could be made to illustrate the principles of Vedānta. Kautilya's *Arthas'astra* (I.6) mentions how the two kings, Rāvaṇa and Duryodhana, came to grief for their sins, the former in not restoring another man's wife (*paradārān aprayacchau*\ out of conceit and the latter another man's legal share of the kingdom. Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvaṁs'a* (cantos X—XV) describes the life of Rāma as a bygone hero of the solar dynasty who was Viṣṇu actually incarnated on earth, living the life of an ideal man to show men how to live under trials and tribulations. No work in the vast range of Sanskrit literature is blurred by the suspicion that Rāma and Sītā are Vedic myths transformed into an allegory by the creative imagination of an Indian poet. The opening chapter of the Bālakāṇḍa expressly states that Vālmīki once asked Nārada (I.1.2) : "Who is the most splendidly gifted and virtuous man at present (*sāmpratam*) on this earth ?" whereupon Nārada forthwith proceeded to describe Rāma as a personage actually living at the time and answering that description. No doubt, "we shall have to make necessary allowance for the imagination of the first poet (*ādi-kavi*), for the *deus ex machina* which the setting of an epic may require and for the later additions by redactors with a grosser taste and a relish for the marvellous and the exaggerated. And when these allowances are made, it may be safely asserted that there is nothing in the epic to justify any distrust of the unanimous traditions of Indian literature that the main events of the Rāmāyaṇa are historical."[3] The question, however, is unimportant for the purposes of this work. We are concerned not so much with the story—noble as it is—as with the times the Rāmāyaṇa portrays. Poets but mirror the times they live in and there is no reason to believe that Vālmīki was an exception. In this connection, the basic fact to be borne in mind is that "a poet, when he is building on old traditions and legends, and, beyond question, when he is relying entirely on his own creative imagination, must people his stage with beings and frame his background out of institutions and things drawn from the living world around him. The manners and customs of the times in which the poet lived would be caught and become imbedded, unconsciously more often than consciously, in his writings with more or less fidelity and amplitude of detail."[4]

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1. M.N. Dutt : *Ibid.*
2. See B.V. Kamesvar Aiyar : *Ibid*, pp. 240-5.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Nagendranath Ghose : *Ibid.* p. 361.

Another related though controversial question is : which of the epics, the Rāmāyaṇa or the *Mahābhārata*, was composed earlier ? The bulk of the Rāmāyaṇa in its present form is certainly older than the bulk of the existing *Mahābhārata*. The smoother versification of the Rāmāyaṇa has led some scholars to suppose that the Rāmāyaṇa must have been composed later. Such suppositions are largely erroneous as a melodious versification, like other poetical merits, is the result of the attainments of individuals and has scarcely been the peculiar property of any particular literary epoch. Keith[1] is of the opinion that Hopkins' view that the metre of the Rāmāyaṇa indicates a later date than that of the second or Pāṇḍu version of the *Mahābhārata*, has not much force, as the Rāmāyaṇa (that is, the original portion of it) is the work of a single author who introduced a more refined and elegant metre. When the metrical argument is thus shown to be of no substantial weight, everything else goes in favour of the fact that a large part of the Rāmāyaṇa belongs to an earlier period : the universal belief that Vālmīki was the first poet, the antiquity of the language of the Rāmāyaṇa, references to it in the *Mahābhārata* and the incorporation in the Rāmāyaṇa of some of the old Brāhmaṇa legends, *e.g.*, the legend of Skanda (VI. 67. 19 ; VI. 69. 30).

A more crucial question is whether the Rāmāyaṇa and the *Mahābhārata* depict society at the same or different stages of evolution, and if the latter be true, which of them represents the earlier stage ?[2] European scholars have suggested that the age of the Rāmāyaṇa must be later in point of time than the age of the *Mahābhārata* on the ground, amongst others, that the Rāmāyaṇa depicts a civilization and a culture superior to that described in the *Mahābhārata*. Yet having regard to the composite authorship of the *Mahābhārata*, one may but expect to find different stages in the evolution of ancient Indian civilization represented in different portions of the epic. Otherwise, the culture of the Rāmāyaṇa represents an earlier epoch of Indian civilization in comparison to the culture depicted in the *Mahābhārata* kernel. The tradition round which the Rāmāyaṇa was built was unquestionably common property when the *Mahābhārata* came to be written. "The leading figures in the Rāmāyaṇa are, besides the Aryans, aboriginals like the Vānaras, Ṛkṣas and Rākṣasas, whilst those of the *Mahābhārata* are men only, the Rākṣasas evidently coming in only to enhance the stage effect, the men-like Vānaras and Ṛkṣas having disappeared completely. The supernatural element and poetic license are kept within more or less fair limits in the Rāmāyaṇa, while they pass all bounds in the *Mahābhārata*. Rāma in spite of his divinity remains of the earth earthy throughout...... The impression left on the reader by a study of the two epics is that there are more kings, more states, more cities, more places of pilgrimage and more civic life generally in the country of the *Mahābhārata*, whilst there are more woods, and forests and more unbeaten tracts generally and more intimate communion with nature in the land of the Rāmāyaṇa."[3] Besides, the economic culture of the Rāmāyaṇa period seems to be more primitive than what we find in the *Mahābhārata*. The predominance of chivalry in the behaviour of the Rāmāyana heroes, the insignificant part played by the *Atharvaveda* in it, and the genealogy of the Solar kings as given in the later Purāṇas, also go to establish the priority of the Rāmāyaṇa. The society of the Rāmāyaṇa is within its geographical limits more settled than that of the *Mahābhārata*, and within those limits there is less of strife.

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1. *The Date of the Rāmāyaṇa, JRAS*, 1915.
2. See Nobinchandra Das : *A Note on the Antiquity of the Rāmāyaṇa* ; P. C. Dharmā : *The Date of the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Educational Review*, Feb. 1945) ; Nagendranath Ghose : *Ibid*, pp. 362-5.
3. Nagendranath Ghose : *Ibid*, pp. 362-3.
4. J.N. Samaddar : *Economic Conditions in Ancient India*, p. 68.

But the civilization of the *Mahābhārata*, such as it is, is geographically wider spread. The political conditions in the Rāmāyaṇa indicate the existence of a number of small independent kingdoms and the absence of any *sarvabhauma* (suzerain) dominion ; while the references of the poets of the *Mahābhārata* to the dominions of eastern India ruled by a powerful king, Jarāsandha, and embracing many lands besides Magadha reflect the political conditions of the fourth century B.C. The absence of any allusions in the Rāmāyaṇa to the famous principalities which figure prominently in the *Mahābhārata* would be inexplicable if its culture was posterior to that of the latter. As the Rāmāyaṇa deals with the glorious days of the Ikṣvāku kings, and as Kosala had fallen into decay and had been swallowed up by the Magadha empire during the Bhārata period, the Rāmāyaṇa period certainly preceded the Bhārata period. A long interval of time must have elapsed to permit the spread of Aryan civilization over the greatly enlarged area which came to be called Bhāratavarṣha in the time of the *Mahābhārata*. Repeated foreign interruptions led the Mlecchas, Yavanas, Śakas, Hūnas, Cīnas and others possessing non-Aryan culture to inhabit different parts of the country. Mleccha, Yavana and non-Kṣatriya princes are respected and even favoured in Duryodhana's court. On the other hand, the Yavanas, etc., are mentioned only twice (I. 54. 21, 23) in the Rāmāyaṇa and are non-entities in the political life of the country. The civilization of the *Mahābhārata* appears to bear to that of the Rāmāyaṇa a relation somewhat similar to that borne by the civilization of the Holy Roman Empire to the Roman. If the Rāmāyaṇa represents the classic epoch of the pre-Buddhistic Indian culture, the *Mahābhārata* represents its subsequently supervening barbarian epoch.[1]

In India, the poem of Vālmīki has been studied and variously expounded for thousands of years, but this has been done in the main from the linguistic, grammatical and theological points of view. In our own epoch, the history of Rāmāyaṇa researches ranges over a period of nearly a century. Lassen, a German scholar, is generally regarded as the pioneer in the field. Weber, Muir, Jacobi, Macdonell, Hopkins, Hans Wirtz, Baumgartner, Ludwig, Levi, Winternitz, Keith and Ruben have devoted a good deal of attention to Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa and have brought their critical acumen to bear upon the interpretation of the epic. But the Western scholars have largely engaged themselves in the textual criticism of the epic, the discussion of its date and the interpretation of its historical narrative. No Occidental scholar of ancient Indian literature gave adequate attention to the importance of studying the Rāmāyaṇa along cultural lines.

Reference, however, must be made to a few Indian scholars who have attempted to examine and analyse the contents of the epic. C.V. Vaidya's *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa* (Bombay, 1906) is a study of the epic from the poetical and historical points of view. Dr. Miss P. C. Dharmā's *The Rāmāyaṇa Polity* (Madras, 1941) investigates into the polity of the Rāmāyaṇa period. The *Lectures on the Rāmāyaṇa* (Madras, 1949) by the late V.S. Srinivasa Sastri constitutes an appreciative study of the Rāmāyaṇa characters, while K.S. Ramaswami Sastri's *Studies in the Rāmāyaṇa* (Baroda, 1944) tries to make a historical, comparative and aesthetic approach to the poem, and solves some of the riddles of the Rāmāyaṇa. But none of these works affords a full and factual survey of the social conditions obtaining in that age. A few scholarly articles on some social aspects of the epic have, no doubt, appeared in oriental journals and commemoration volumes ; but whereas these studies are disjointed and deal with stray topics of the epic, the present attempt is at giving a fairly comprehensive account of the people of India and their manner of living in the Rāmāyaṇa age. In doing so, Vālmīki's work has been studied as a human document, possessing sociological importance, rather than as a poem eulogizing the exploits of an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Obviously, only the *kulturgeschichte*, as can be gleaned from the epic, has been the subject of this investigation, political history and conditions being relegated to a subsidiary position for the purpose.

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[1] Nagendranath Ghose : *Ibid*, pp. 363-5.

It may, however, be proper to give here a brief idea of the political conditions of the Rāmāyaṇa times as a background to the sociological conditions inasmuch as a well-governed State alone can act as the upholder and maintainer of the social set-up. The extent of the Indian territory under the Aryans extended from Gāndhāra and Kekaya in the north-west to Videha or Mithilā and Aṅga in the west, Saurāṣṭra in the south-west and the great Daṇḍaka forest in the south. The region to the south of the Vindhyas was the abode of aboriginal tribes where, excepting for a few hermitages founded by adventurous ṛṣis like Agastya, there were no Aryan settlements in existence. The Aryan polity in the Rāmāyaṇa age was marked by the same type of feudalism as that in the *Mahābhārata*. King Daśaratha, though he is often called a universal ruler (I.8.23), appears actually to have governed only the region of Kosala with its capital at Ayodhyā. But he exercised a sort of suzerainty over a wider area which was parcelled out among a number of tribute-paying feudatories over whom the suzerain exercised a firm hold and influence.

The Rāmāyaṇa knows of only the monarchical form of government. Representative institutions like the *sabhā*, *paura* and *jānapada* acted as checks on the king's absolutism. People had a voice in the choice of their king who was dependent in matters of moment on the ministry and the various representative assemblies of the people. The details of administration were in the hands of competent ministers. The *purohita* or chief priest played a predominant part in the polity of the land being a confidential adviser of the king in spiritual and secular matters alike. The system of administration, whether revenue, law, justice, municipal or military, was far from rudimentary and was very much like that of the later periods.[1]

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[1] See P.C. Dharmā : *The Rāmāyaṇa Polity*, p. 97.

2

THE STORY OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

I. *Bālakāṇḍa* (*Early Life*)

Vālmīki, the saint-poet, once asked of the roving sage Nārada, reputed for his wide experience and mature judgment, as to who was the most striking figure of the contemporary world—striking in the qualities of head and heart. Nārada's unequivocal choice was in favour of Rāma, the ideal man and king, then ruling over the kingdom of Kosala. He briefly narrated to Vālmīki the outstanding traits of Rāma's life and career. After Nārada's departure, Vālmīki—his mind overwhelmed with the greatness of the story he had heard—repaired to the banks of the river Tamasā for his usual bath. There he sighted a *krauñca* bird, wounded by a fowler's arrow while it was delighting in the sweet lap of its mate. His mind was overwhelmed with pity and grief for the wounded bird, and in his wrath, he pronounced a curse on the wicked fowler. It was ordained that this curse, under the stress of emotion, should unconsciously take the form of a regular verse, perfect in natural rhythm and measure. It was not simple coincidence that Brahmā, the Creator, urged Vālmīki to compose the great story of Rāma in that same metrical form and thus immortalize the subject, the poem and the composer till aeon's waning. Vālmīki reflected over his subject with a singularity of purpose and steadfastness of devotion and built a clear picture of the thrilling story on the broad canvas of his mind. Then he set to composing the Rāmāyaṇa which he taught to two boys—Kuśa and Lava—who popularized it by singing it to the accompaniment of the lyre to entranced gatherings in the city and country alike. The story they related runs thus :

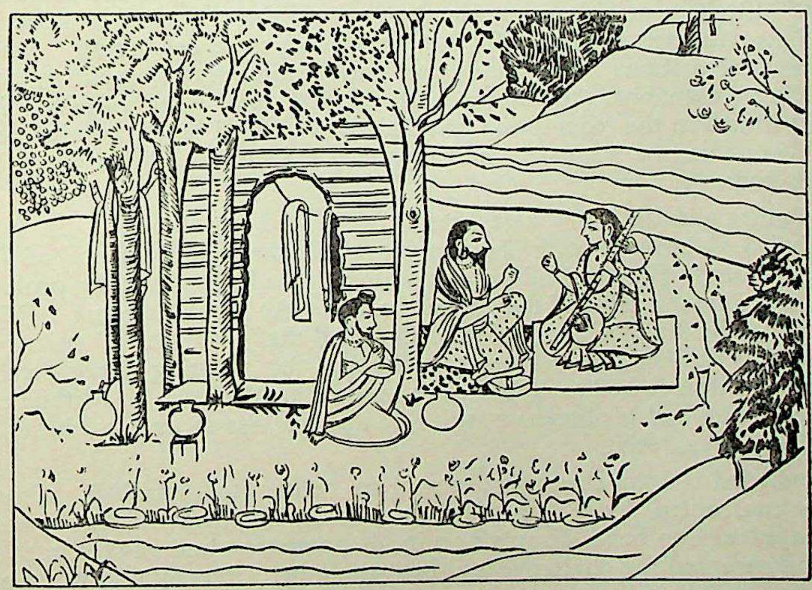

Fig. 2. Nārada and Vālmīki ; Kangra, *circa* eighteenth century A.D. (National Museum, Government of India).

To the north of the holy Gaṅgā, on the banks of the Sarayū, stood the flourishing and mighty city of Ayodhyā, the capital of the Ikṣvāku kingdom of Kosala. King Daśaratha, a noble and righteous monarch, ruled this kingdom through a cabinet of ministers well versed in administration and politics. Daśaratha was, however, childless. In his deep desire to beget children to perpetuate his race, the king first performed an Aśvamedha and then a Putreṣṭi sacrifice, by the merit of which he was granted four sons from his three queens—Rāma from Kausalyā, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna from Sumitrā and Bharata from Kaikeyī. Between them all existed exemplary brotherly love. To Daśaratha, they were all very dear. But Rāma being the eldest and the most virtuous was the dearest to his father. In course of time, the children grew up into handsome princes and acquired proficiency in the civil and military knowledge of the day. Daśaratha then began thinking of getting them married.

At this juncture, there came to his court the sage Viśvāmitra who begged of the king to lend him the services of Rāma to safeguard his sacrifices from the onslaught of demons (Rākṣasas). Daśaratha was taken aback. Yet not daring to disregard the request of the great sage, with great reluctance he let his son go. Lakṣmaṇa, very much attached to his brother, followed Rāma. During their stay with Viśvāmitra, the sage taught Rāma some occult sciences and initiated him in the use of several military weapons. This knowledge, coupled with his prowess, helped Rāma to annihilate Tāṭakā, a demoness, and other molesting beings, thus enabling the sage to complete his religious rites. Thereafter, Viśvāmitra took him to the court of Janaka, the king of Mithilā, a neighbouring kingdom, where the *svayaṁvara* (selection of the spouse) of his daughter, the beautiful Sītā, was going to be celebrated. On the way, Viśvāmitra regaled Rāma with many an entertaining story such as that of his ancestor King Kuśanābha, the descent of the Gaṅgā and King Sagara. Meanwhile Rāma contributed to the redemption of Ahalyā, who had been condemned by her husband, Gautama, to seclusion and mortification for her adultery with Indra, the king of the gods.

Viśvāmitra and his party were heartily welcomed by Janaka. Śatānanda, the son of Ahalyā, who was with Janaka, extolled the achievements of Viśvāmitra, originally a Kṣatriya (warrior) of strong passions, who had turned, by prolonged self-discipline, a Brāhmaṇa saint of the highest order. At Janaka's court, Rāma broke the famous massive bow of Śiva, which had defied the strength of many a valiant prince, and thus fulfilled the necessary condition for winning Sītā's hand. Royal messengers were despatched to Ayodhyā to invite Rāma's father to Mithilā ; and the weddings of Rāma and his brothers with Sītā and her sisters were celebrated with due ceremonial and great eclat.

The married couples thereupon set out to return to Ayodhyā. On the way, Rāma was confronted by Paraśurāma, an implacable enemy of the Kṣatriya class, who challenged him to bend Viṣṇu's bow in his possession and engage in a duel with him. Rāma accepted the challenge and bent the bow. Paraśurāma was worsted and compelled to sue for peace.

Back at Ayodhyā, the princes and their brides were welcomed by the queen-mothers. A few days thereafter, Daśaratha sent Bharata with his uncle to his maternal grandfather, the Kekaya king. Śatrughna too accompanied him, while Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa remained at home. For twelve years, Rāma lived in conjugal happiness with Sītā. Their love was reciprocal, deep and steadfast. At the same time, Rāma was greatly attached to his parents and discharged his royal duties under his father's direction.

II. Ayodhyākāṇḍa (*Family Crisis*)

Rāma's deportment and wisdom as well as ennobling virtues such as humility, sweetness of temper, courage, devotion, and benevolence made him the favourite not only of his family but also of the people at large. It was, therefore, in the fitness of things that Daśaratha should propose to his assembly Rāma's name for nomination as heir-apparent (*yuvarāja*)—a proposal that was unanimously approved. The king summoned the prince in the august assembly and gave him a sermon on the right conduct of kings. The installation ceremony was fixed for the very next day, as the auspicious *puṣya* star happened to be ruling then. The news quickly spread around the city and gave rise to universal rejoicings and festivities. But fate had decreed that Rāma should not become the king yet. The news inflamed the jealousy of Mantharā, a hump-backed maid of Kaikeyī, the favourite young wife of the king. The installation of Rāma on the throne was, as she thought, the virtual end of her mistress's, and therefore her, influence at court. She, therefore, made up her mind to poison Kaikeyī's ears and hinder the approaching event.

At first Kaikeyī was not amenable to the misteachings of Mantharā as her affection for Rāma was very strong. The sly maid's determination was not broken and she repeatedly painted before the queen the dismal prospect of her complete supersession and her son Bharata's misery at the rise to fortune of her co-wife Kausalyā. And Kaikeyī yielded at last. It was not very difficult to stop the coronation. The maid reminded the queen of the two boons which the old king had granted her on a previous occasion and which had remained unavailed of till then. She was to make capital out of them now and secure the coronation of her son Bharata by one and the banishment of Rāma to the woods by the other.

On the other side, after the assembly session was over, Daśaratha returned in the evening to Kaikeyī's palace only to find his beloved queen in high dudgeon. The king took solemn oaths to do anything to please her ; but his grief and indignation knew no bounds when Kaikeyī came out with her two sinister demands. Yet the king was quite helpless to deny them, bound as he was by a solemn promise. That whole night the king tried all means to win over Kaikeyī by cajoling, imploring and even threatening, but the adamant queen did not budge an inch.

When the day dawned, Kaikeyī asked Sumantra, the charioteer, to fetch Rāma to her. Riding his chariot through the crowded streets, decorated with flags and buntings, Rāma in high spirits came to see his father but was upset to find him worried and disconsolate. Daśaratha was too dumbfounded to address him direct, but Kaikeyī unabashedly told him to help the king to prove a man of honour by fulfilling his promised word to her. Rāma, not lacking in chivalry, gave his unqualified assent to depart to the forest and, without any feeling of anguish or regret, went to take leave of his mother and wife. It was with great difficulty that he could secure his mother's permission to go to the woods. But Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa would not be persuaded to remain behind.

The entire city was plunged in mourning when Rāma, with his wife and brother, left for the forest in a chariot to make his father truthful to his promise. Passing through several villages, the party reached Śṛṅgaverapura, on the borders of Kosala, and were hospitably received by its king, Guha. Here, Rāma left the chariot, donned the ascetic's robes and sent back the charioteer Sumantra to Ayodhyā with messages of respect and affection for his parents and brothers. Then crossing the Gaṅgā in a boat supplied by Guha, the party proceeded on foot on their forest wandering. They halted for some time at Bharadvāja's hermitage and, proceeding south, set up their abode on the hill of Citrakūṭa.

At Ayodhyā, Daśaratha soon breathed his last and the kingdom was without a ruler. Vasiṣṭha, the *de facto* chief minister, at once sent messengers to summon Bharata from Kekaya, and on his arrival offered him the crown. But Bharata, great and noble, would never dream of committing this unrighteous act and went, along with the queen-mothers, the army and the citizens, to Citrakūṭa to press Rāma to return home. On the way, sage Bharadvāja accorded him a reception in the right royal fashion. On reaching Citrakūṭa, Bharata did all in his power to persuade Rāma to leave his forest sojourn and assume the sovereignty of Kosala. But Rāma would not be deflected from his resolution to carry out his father's word. At long last Bharata returned to Ayodhyā, took the vow of an ascetic, and continued to govern the kingdom with Rāma's holy sandals, which he had brought along with him, placed on the throne.

After Bharata's departure, Rāma left Citrakūṭa and, halting for a day with the sage Atri and his pious wife, Anasūyā, proceeded to the Daṇḍaka forest in the Deccan.

III. *Araṇyakāṇḍa* (*Forest Sojourn*)

At the edge of the Daṇḍaka forest, Rāma came upon an extensive *āśrama* (hermitage) inhabited by anchorites devoted to a life of spiritual discipline. After accepting their spontaneous hospitality and benedictions, Rāma penetrated into the wild forest where he was confronted by a hideous monster, Virādha. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa killed him and repaired to the *āśrama* of sage Śarabhaṅga, who was waiting for his arrival before departing for the next world. The sage gave Rāma his blessings and shuffled off his mortal coils. On way to the hermitage of another saint, Sutīkṣṇa by name, Rāma was met by a body of hermits of various orders living in the area who sought his protection against the Rākṣasas who used to molest them and desecrate their hermitages. Rāma assured them of his protection and promised to rid the wood of all evil beings. Sītā, however, saw no reason why Rāma, an ascetic given to non-violence, should use his arms against the Rākṣasas, especially when they had given him no offence. Rāma explained that it was his bounden duty to protect the sages against the orgies of the Rākṣasas, all the more as he had given them his word of honour.

Rāma spent ten years of his exile in visiting several *āśramas* of the Daṇḍaka area, extending them the required protection. At the end of this period, he arrived at the abode of Agastya, a far-famed sage who had colonized the otherwise uninhabitable South. On his advice, Rāma decided to go to Pañcavaṭī, a lovely spot on the banks of the Godāvarī, to spend the rest of his exile in the company of his wife and brother in peace.

But the days of Rāma's real trials and tribulations were yet to come. Śūrpanakhā, a sister of Rāvaṇa, the king of Lankā, happened to be around Pañcavaṭī. No sooner did she look upon Rāma, so graceful and comely, than she found him desirable. Her whole being, body and soul, whatever she possessed, yearned for Rāma's virile form. She blatantly asked him to marry her and pounced upon Sītā to devour her so that Rāma may not have any choice left but to accept her. This was hideous and, at Rāma's bidding, Lakṣmaṇa punished the demoness by swiftly cutting off her nose and ears with his sword. The disfigured monstress fled to her brother, Khara, and incited him to wreak vengeance. Khara sent fourteen Rākṣasas to chastise Rāma, but on their annihilation by Rāma, himself set out with an impressive army of 14,000 Rākṣasas under the lead of Dūṣaṇa. Many were the evil omens that he encountered on the way, but undeterred, he marched on. Rāma sent Sītā with Lakṣmaṇa into a safe cave and, confronting the invading hosts single-handed, inflicted a crushing discomfiture on them.

The terror-stricken Śūrpaṇakhā hastened to Rāvaṇa, narrated to him her tale of woe, and importunately asked him to kidnap Rāma's beautiful wife, Sītā, by way of revenge. The lustful Rāvaṇa readily agreed and went to Mārīca for aid and advice. Mārīca strongly disapproved of his sinister intention and cautioned him not to imperil the Rākṣasa race by rousing Rāma's wrath. Rāvaṇa, however, was heedless and compelled Mārīca, on the pain of death, to assume the form of a deer and entice Rāma away. Helpless, Mārīca put on the guise of an alluring deer. At its very first sight, Sītā was enraptured by its variegated colours and frolicksome movements, and exhorted Rāma to capture it, dead or alive. Leaving Sītā in Lakṣmaṇa's custody, Rāma chased the deer-disguised Mārīca who lured him far into the jungle and, while in the act vanishing, raised a loud wail imitative of Rāma's voice. This Rāma-like wail reached Sītā's ears on the other side of the jungle, who, fearing trouble, asked Lakṣmaṇa to run to his brother's aid. Lakṣmaṇa was at first reluctant to go, sure as he was of his brother's unassailable strength. Sītā grew impatient and even taunted him by saying that he had an evil design on her. So Lakṣmaṇa left, though not without doubts and anguish.

Sītā was now left alone, and Rāvaṇa, seizing the chance, appeared on the scene. All his fulsome praise of her beauty and his own might and splendour failed to make her amenable to his advances. Thereupon Rāvaṇa forcibly carried her off in an aerial chariot. Sītā bitterly cried for help but to no avail. Jaṭāyu, a chief of the Gīdhra tribe, tried to intercept Rāvaṇa but was fatally wounded in the process. During the flight, Sītā saw five Vānara chiefs on the top of a mountain. Unnoticed by Rāvaṇa, she tied some of her ornaments in her upper cloth and threw them in their midst in the hope that they might tell Rāma of her fate. On reaching Laṅkā, Rāvaṇa showed Sītā all the pomp and magnificence of his matchless city and besought her love. But Sīta would have nothing to do with him. He placed her in his Aśoka garden under the vigil of a group of Rakṣasīs and warned her that if within a period of twelve months she did not yield to him, he would hack her to pieces.

Meanwhile, at Pañcavaṭī, Rāma hurried to his cottage after slaying Mārīca. His anxiety was all the more heightened when he was met on the way by Lakṣmaṇa whom he reprimanded for having left Sītā alone in the forest. Not finding Sītā in the hut, his mind was unhinged with sorrow and he began to lament almost like a demented person. Lakṣmaṇa, however, did not lose his presence of mind and, exhorting his brother to shake off his despondency, encouraged him to search for Sītā with diligence. As both brothers roamed over the forest, they came across the dying Gīdhra, Jaṭāyu, who, before breathing his last, gave them an indication of the direction in which Rāvaṇa had carried off Sītā. Proceeding south, the brothers were attacked by Kabandha, a headless demon with huge arms. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa cut off his arms and burnt him on a pyre. Before dying, the repentant demon advised Rāma to go to Sugrīva, a Vānara chieftain who lived on the banks of the Pampā lake, and make friends with him as he might prove of help in the recovery of Sītā.

On way to Sugrīva's habitation, Rāma halted for a while at the hermitage of Mataṅga, where he was welcomed by Śabarī, a pious old woman who was waiting for his arrival since long. Now that her heart-felt craving was fulfilled, she received Rāma's blessings and sacrificed her mortal frame in the flaming fire.

IV. Kiskindhākāṇḍa (*Alliance with the Vānaras*)

The charming surroundings of the Pampā lake were enough to arouse once again in Rāma's mind the sweet memories of Sītā and make her separation unbearable for him. But consoled by his brother, he took heart and continued on his way to mount Ṛṣyamūka where Sugrīva lived in exile, in terror of his brother Vālī. Sugrīva, on seeing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from a distance, mistook them for the emissaries of Vālī and sent one of his ministers, Hanumān, to ascertain their intentions. Hanumān accosted them in a faultless and engaging speech and came to learn how Rāma, with his wife kidnapped, was in the same straits as Sugrīva who too was expelled by his brother after seizing his wife Rumā. Hanumān saw that an alliance between the two would be to their mutual advantage and took Rāma to his master. Sugrīva was delighted to receive him. A life-long friendship was established between the two exiles, with sacred fire as witness, both solemnly promising to help each other in recovering their abducted spouses.

First it was Rāma's turn to help. They all went to Kiṣkindhā, the capital of Vālī's kingdom, where Sugrīva challenged his brother to a duel. Without paying heed to the advice of his intelligent wife, Tārā, to patch up his differences with Sugrīva, Vālī came out of his palace and entered into a deadly combat with his brother. When Sugrīva began to weaken in the combat, Rāma from a vantage-point shot an arrow at Vālī and mortally wounded him. The dying Vālī censured him severely for the impropriety of his action, but Rāma justified it by saying that for Vālī's despicable act of incest—of having appropriated Sugrīva's wife—he deserved the extreme penalty.

Now it was Sugrīva's turn to return Rāma's favour by aiding in his wife's recovery whose whereabouts were unknown. He had already shown him the cloth and jewels which Sītā had dropped while being carried away by Rāvaṇa. At first, however, in the flush of his newly won royal fortune, Sugrīva was steeped in sensual pleasures with Rumā, his wife, and Tārā, Vālī's widow, and forgot about his promise to Rāma. Rāma sent Lakṣmaṇa to remind him that the way Vālī had gone was still open for Sugrīva to follow if he backed out. Lakṣmaṇa gave Sugrīva a sharp reprimand but Tārā tactfully saved the situation. Sugrīva was at last aroused from sloth and sent Vānaras in the four directions to discover Sītā. Hanumān accompanied the party that went to the South, and he was given by Rāma his signet ring so that, in the event of finding Sītā, he might show it to her in proof of his *bona fides*.

Excepting the expedition that went to the South, all the others returned home unsuccessful in their mission within the allotted one month's time-limit. Hanumān's search party roamed over forests and mountains but failed to get any clue of Sītā's actual whereabouts. They also had various adventures, one being the discovery of the wonderful cave habitation of the nun Svayamprabhā. By this time, the one month's limit had elapsed and, fearing Sugrīva's wrath, they all decided not to return home but instead perish by self-imposed starvation.

At this juncture, Sampāti, a Gīdhra chief, elder brother of Jatāyu, came to their rescue and informed them that it was Rāvaṇa, the Rākṣasa king of the island kingdom of Laṅkā, who had kidnapped and confined Sītā in his palace, and advised them to find out some way of crossing the ocean and bring back news of her. This set the Vānaras all a-happy, but crossing the deep was a formidable task which no one seemed capable or willing to undertake. Jāmbavān, an old Ṛkṣa chieftain, prompted Hanumān by extolling his strength, skill and fleetness and thus roused him to achieve the wonderful feat of leaping across the ocean to Laṅkā and search out Sītā. This exhortation made Hanumān alive to his own unparalleled prowess and, taking off from the Mahendra mountain, he flew over the sea towards Laṅkā.

V. Sundarakāṇḍa (*The Discovery of Sītā*)

The valiant Hanumān sped across the blue expanse of the sea and at about sunset landed on the northern shore of the island of Laṅkā in a thicket of coconut groves. He beheld some distance away, on the summit of a high mountain, the city of Laṅkā, its lofty towers gleaming in the light of the setting sun. It was a well-guarded citadel and so Hanumān took every care to enter it unobserved. At night-fall, he assumed an insignificant exterior and tried to steal through the city-gate where he was challenged by Laṅkinī, a Rākṣasī guard. Hanumān chastised her appropriately and proceeded further. He was lost in admiration of the beauty, grandeur and artistic lay-out of the Rākṣasa metropolis bathed in the bright moonlight. There were majestic buildings on all sides resounding with the laughter of joyous ladies, the jingling of their ornaments and the music of various instruments. There was gaiety and merriment all round. The parks and streets were filled with pleasure-seekers. Rāvaṇa's own palace was like a city within a city. It was a huge and extensive structure, perfect in art and workmanship, filled with gaiety and revelry. Hanumān also saw and minutely examined the Puṣpaka-*vimāna*, Rāvaṇa's renowned aerial car, unsurpassed in its precious build and artistic decoration. Late at night, when all the inmates were asleep, he crept into Rāvaṇa's bed-chamber and the apartments attached to it. He saw hosts of beauties in dishevelled dress either asleep or in a state of stupor as a result of drink and dalliance. For a moment, Hanumān mistook Mandodarī, the beautiful senior queen of Rāvaṇa, for Sītā but soon realized his mistake, for, thought he, a model of chastity like Sītā could not look so charming after separation from her lord.

The search proving barren, Hanumān was greatly depressed and even began to think of ending his life. But soon better sense prevailed and he decided to look for Sītā elsewhere. He came out of the palace and began scanning the adjoining Aśoka park. It was an extensive and lovely garden, equipped with diverse means of recreation, almost a paradise on earth. In one corner, he saw a woman under a tree surrounded by a number of hideous female guards. From her dress and appearance, Hanumān took her to be Sītā. He was deeply grieved at seeing her miserable condition. He was lost in reverie pondering over her greatness as a chaste lady when, a little before day-break, Rāvaṇa came to the garden to pay his usual visit to her. Hanumān concealed himself on a tree and observed all that passed below. Rāvaṇa repeated his coaxing and cajoling of Sītā and implored her to yield to his wishes. But Sītā treated him with contumely which stirred up Rāvaṇa's wrath. He told her that if she did not change her mind within two months, she would be brought to his kitchen and served for his breakfast.

After Rāvaṇa has gone, Sītā was in the depths of despair and she made up her mind to hang herself from a tree. Hanumān was witnessing all this, and just as Sītā was preparing herself for suicide, he began to recite, in homely language, Rāma's story and thus captured her attention. Later, Hanumān came down from the tree, introduced himself as Rāma's messenger and presented to her his signet ring. Sītā was thrilled and felt as if her husband was near. She flooded Hanumān with questions about the well-being of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and asked him to tell them that if they did not come to her rescue within a month, she would end her life. She declined Hanumān's offer to take her on his back forthwith to Rāma, as it was improper and hazardous. The honourable course, she said, was for Rāma to invade Laṅkā, annihilate the Rākṣasas and take her back in triumph. Sītā gave Hanumān her crest-jewel (*cūḍāmaṇi*) for delivery to Rāma as an urgent summons. She feelingly gave loving messages for Rāma and his brother and asked Hanumān to remind Rāma of the many little happy incidents reminiscent of their mutual love and sport.

Hanumān then bade Sītā adieu, but before leaving Laṅkā decided to indulge in some exhibition of valour. He destroyed the Aśoka garden, killed the guards and struck terror all around. When Rāvaṇa was informed of this, he sent several Rākṣasa generals in succession to subjugate the formidable intruder, but they all met with their death at his hands. Among those killed was Akṣa, Rāvaṇa's son. Then as a last resort Rāvaṇa sent Indrajit, his second son, who was a renowned warrior of great prowess. Indrajit bound Hanumān with Brahmāstra, an unfailing missile, and brought him to Rāvaṇa's presence. Hanumān was struck with awe at Rāvaṇa's majestic figure and the resplendence of his court but felt that he was unwittingly compassing his own self-destruction because of his addiction to unrighteousness. Hanumān fearlessly introduced himself as Rāma's messenger, impressed upon Rāvaṇa the impropriety of his kidnapping Sītā and urged him to return her to Rāma. But Rāvaṇa was too puffed up with pride to heed this salutary advice and ordered the death of the Vānara. At the instance of Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa's youngest brother, this death sentence was reduced to the burning of his tail. Hanumān was paraded through the city, but he escaped and, with his burning tail, jumped from house to house, setting fire to all. Laṅkā was in flames and the people, getting panicky, ran pell-mell to escape from the conflagration.

Hanumān saw Sītā again and took leave of her. At one bound, he crossed the ocean and landed on the Indian shore where his companions gave him a thunderous ovation. Then they all went to Rāma and Sugrīva, revelling on the way in Sugrīva's pleasure orchard, Madhuvana. Hanumān gave Rāma a full account of his adventure, of Sītā's forlorn condition and her pathetic appeal for rescue, and handed over to him her crest-jewel. All this was enough to surge in Rāma's heart an uncontrollable flood of emotion and an impatient desire to rush to her rescue. Again and again, he asked Hanumān to tell him how she was and to recount all that she had said.

VI. Yuddhakāṇḍa (*The War*)

Rāma learnt from Hanumān the details about the fortification of Laṅkā and asked Sugrīva to pass orders for the march of the Vānara army. In boundless enthusiasm, the Vānara host in perfect discipline marched southwards and reached the shores of the Laṅkā sea. The problem that confronted them now was how to cross the deep channel.

The news also reached Rāvaṇa who summoned a meeting of his advisory council to consider how to meet the invasion. The councillors bestowed fulsome flattery on Rāvaṇa and advised him not to be bothered by the threat as they were sure to destroy with their arms Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sugrīva and Hanumān along with their followers. Vibhīṣaṇa, however, disagreed with them and, emphasizing the justness of Rāma's cause, advised Rāvaṇa to return Vaidehī (Sītā) to Rāma and make peace with him. This highly enraged Rāvaṇa ; he called his brother a traitor and turned him out of the assembly.

Thereupon Vibhīṣaṇa with his followers came to Rāma's camp and gave himself over to him. Rāma, in spite of the advice of his friends to the contrary, welcomed him and gave him unconditional refuge. From Vibhīṣaṇa Rāma learnt some valuable facts about the army and might of the Rākṣasa heroes.

Soon an imposing bridge was constructed across the ocean and the Vānara army crossed over to Laṅkā in overwhelming numbers which Rāvaṇa had never anticipated. He sent several spies to find out the strength of Rāma's army. At this stage, too, Rāvaṇa's maternal grandfather, Mālyavān, tried to dissuade Rāvaṇa from war, but his advice went unheeded. Rāvaṇa gave orders for the mobilization of the Rākṣasa forces and posted his generals to guard the four approaches to the city. He personally supervised army manoeuvres and troop dispositions.

On Rāma's side, plans were finalized for the invasion of Laṅkā. Before the battle began, Rāma sent Aṅgada to Rāvaṇa's court with a final offer for peace. But he was treated with insult and, upon his return, the siege of Laṅkā began in right earnest—the Vānaras making a tremendous charge on the city from all sides and the Rākṣasas trying to repel the attack. The fight continued for several days with immense slaughter on both sides. Indrajit hit Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with snake missiles, whereupon the brothers fell down unconscious. They were, however, soon brought back to consciousness and cured of their wounds by Garuḍa. In turn several Rākṣasa heroes—Dhūmrākṣa, Vajradaṁṣṭra, Akampana, Prahasta, Indrajit and Kumbhakarṇa—fell. Then Rāvaṇa took the field himself. He struck horror into the rank and file of the Vānaras. Rāma challenged him and after several ups and downs succeeded in slaying him ; and thus ended the war.

At Rāvaṇa's annihilation, Vibhīṣaṇa was installed as the king of Laṅkā. Thereafter, he brought Sītā into Rāma's presence, but Rāma, to her agony and surprise, declined to accept her on the plea that she might have been defiled during her long stay in the enemy's house and that he had waged war only to avenge the wrong done to him by Rāvaṇa. Sītā, after quietly remonstrating against this, decided to immolate herself in fire. At her bidding, Lakṣmaṇa prepared a pyre. With supreme confidence in her own purity, Sītā, amid the breathless suspense of all assembled, entered the fire. What followed was miraculous. From out of the blaze there sprang an august being, Agni, the god of fire, who in a grave voice solemnly testified to Sītā's unsullied purity and chastity and asked Rāma to accept her back without any mental qualms. This was done, and all were happy at the reconciliation of the long-separated couple.

The return journey to Ayodhyā was done in Rāvaṇa's aerial car, the Puṣpaka. Rāma was accompanied by several of his Vānara and Rākṣasa allies. As they sped through the sky, Rāma showed to Sītā the places of interest connected with their forest sojourn. On the way, at Sītā's request, Tārā, Rumā and other wives of the principal Vānaras were given a lift in the car. They halted for a while at Bharadvāja's *āśrama* from where Rāma sent Hanumān in advance to Ayodhyā to inform Bharata of his return home.

When Bharata was apprised of the glad tidings, he gave orders for according a splendid reception to Rāma and his company. The whole city of Ayodhyā was decorated like a bride. The citizens repaired to Nandigrāma where the aerial car was to land. Rāma was greeted with tremendous shouts of joy and taken in a grand procession to Ayodhyā. All the guests were comfortably accommodated in palaces and profuse gifts were offered to them by Rāma. Sage Vasiṣṭha installed Rāma along with Sītā on the throne of Ayodhyā and anointed him as king. Thereafter followed unparalleled joy and happiness in the country during Rāma's long, just and benevolent reign.

VII. Uttarakāṇḍa (*The Finale*)

Immediately after Rāma's coronation, several sages came to his court to felicitate him on his accession to the throne and his triumphant victory over Rāvaṇa. At Rāma's request, Agastya narrated to him at length the history of the Rākṣasa race—how Rāvaṇa and his followers came to power and became the terror of the then known world. The coronation festivities over, the guests returned to their respective places and Rāma engaged himself in the righteous administration of the kingdom.

However, there was a strong current of public opinion in Kosala which was critical of and opposed to Rāma's re-acceptance of Sītā as his wife, because she was seemingly defiled by her long stay in Rāvaṇa's house. Rāma came to know of this through his intelligence officers and, in order to assuage public feeling, decided with a heavy heart to forsake Sītā as a stern act of the ideal king's response to public opinion. Sītā was then in an advanced stage of pregnancy and had earlier expressed her desire to re-visit the *āśramas* of the forest-dwelling sages. At Rāma's behest, Lakṣmaṇa took her in a chariot and left her in the forest. Sītā was subsequently given an asylum by Vālmīki in his *āśrama* where she gave birth to the twin sons, Kuśa and Lava.

Rāma was, however, beset with grief at his own harsh act which he had to commit in spite of himself. But mindful of a king's relentless vocation, he applied himself to the discharge of his royal functions.

At the instance of the sages, he sent his youngest brother, Śatrughna, to subjugate Lavaṇa, the demon king of Madhupurī. After killing him, Śatrughna founded there the Śaurasena principality.

One day a Brāhmaṇa with his dead child came to Rāma's court and began to lament over his misfortune. It was something very unusual in Rāma's reign that a son should die before his father. Nārada told him that such untoward incidents were attributable to some unrighteous action being committed by someone among his subjects that was a flagrant departure from the established practice of the four castes. Rāma thereupon went out in search of the defaulter and found Śambūka, a man belonging to the lowest caste, the Śūdras, performing penance—a practice that was the prerogative of the first three castes. Rāma killed him with his own hands for his attempt to transgress the established moral order. This restored the dead child to life.

Rāma thereafter decided to perform an Aśvamedha (horse sacrifice) to proclaim his unquestioned royal supremacy in the country.

In the meantime, Sītā's twin sons, Kuśa and Lava, had grown up into adolescence under the paternal care of Vālmīki. The sage had composed an epic poem, the Rāmāyaṇa, celebrating the exploits of Rāma and had taught it to the two boys. And it so happened that Vālmīki also visited Rāma's horse sacrifice where the audience was heartily regaled by the twin brothers' enchanting recital of the epic poem, Rāmāyaṇa. When Rāma came to know that they were his own sons born of Sītā, he expressed a desire to re-accept her if she solemnly declared her chastity in the presence of the assembled gathering. This Sītā did—but, unable to contain her bitter pain at having to repeat a test already once proven triumphantly, broke in the course of pathetic affirmations of unsullied purity and gave up her soul.

Now all was bleak and meaningless for Rāma and he began to feel that the time had come when he should end his earthly career.

Bharata meanwhile had conquered for him the land of the Gandharvas in North-Western India. The sons of Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa were installed on the thrones of the newly conquered kingdoms.

Another event that was enough to break Rāma's heart was the abandonment of Lakṣmaṇa for a default of his in obeying Rāma's orders. With his dearest brother gone and his beloved wife no more in this world, life held no longer any charm for him and he shuffled off his mortal coils.

CHAPTER I

THE PEOPLE

If a man of the Rāmāyaṇa age were, by some Wellsian device, projected into the present-day India, he would be bewildered by the wide variety of peoples inhabiting this ancient country. He would be particularly struck by the different religious faiths prevailing in the land and by the many languages spoken. His amazement would be justified to some extent ; for, in his days, there were, broadly speaking, only two groups of people living in the country—the Aryans and the non-Aryans (tribes). Each had its sub-sections, but these were not many.

The Aryans, who were considered the superior class and came within the framework of the caste-system, occupied practically the whole of the Indo-Gangetic plain, while to the south of it—mostly forest country—lived the tribes. This study deals mainly with the Aryan way of life except that a broad outline has been given of the Rākṣasas and the Vānaras in the next two chapters.

The Aryans, by virtue of their superior civilization and culture, gradually overran the whole sub-continent ; some tribes helped the Aryans in this, while others who resisted were humbled and, in course of time, came under the Aryan suzerainty.

The greater part of the tribes south of the Vindhya range submitted to the institutions of the Aryans ; but towards the extremity of the peninsula and in Laṅkā, there was a ferocious black race opposed to the Aryan way of worship. To this race they gave the name of Rākṣasas—an appellation which in the Vedas is assigned to hostile, savage and hated beings. It was against this race that the expedition of Rāma, recorded in the Rāmāyaṇa, was directed. The Rākṣasas are depicted as infesting the hermitages or settlements of the Aryans, as obstructing their sacred rites, as enemies of the Brāhmaṇas, as horrible in aspect and as changing their forms at will. They were constantly at feud with the Sanskrit-speaking Aryans of North India. The Rākṣasas played an important part in the political history of pre-*Bhārata* India. Their civilization was great and refined, yet sensuous, vicious and cruel beyond measure. They had an unbridled licence in matters of food and sex, and had even cannibalistic habits.

Next to the Rākṣasas, the Vānaras play an important part in the epic. These were another aboriginal tribe of the Deccan. They allied themselves with the Aryans and embraced their form of religious worship. Though they differed from the Aryans in race, language, colour and features, they must have shown a disposition to receive Aryan civilization, since they entered into league with Rāma and joined in his expedition against the Rākṣasas further south. Vālī and Sugrīva were their chiefs. To all intents and purposes, they were the woodland inhabitants of India south of the Vindhya range, wearing the tail as the totem of their tribe, and not actual *vānaras* or monkeys as they are generally described. They were perhaps so-called in contempt of their savage or uncouth appearance and also perhaps because they were little known at that time.[1] Their sexual relations smacked of promiscuity.

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[1] J. Muir : *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. ii, pp. 416-9.

Besides the Rākṣasas and the Vānaras, there were other tribes of less import such as the Niṣādas, Gṛdhras, Śabaras, Yakṣas and Nāgas, described below briefly.[1]

The Niṣādas lived between the borders of Kosala and the Gaṅgā. Śṛṅgaverapura, on the banks of this river, was presumably their capital city, and Guha, their chief. The Niṣādas were good archers and they even prepared themselves to oppose Bharata on his march to Citrakūṭa (II. 84. 3-8). A riverine people, possessing an abundant supply of timber from the forests, they were good boat-builders and ferrymen. It was Guha who helped Rāma cross the Gaṅgā in a comfortable boat (II. 52. 8). The Niṣāda king was a friend of the Kosala prince and accorded a hearty reception to the exiles Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā. Rāma is described as advancing to embrace him (II. 50. 35). Bharata accepted every kind of food offered by Guha. Thus the Aryans had no objection either to touching these men of the forest or to partaking of food offered by them.

The Niṣādas—their culture was probably Neolithic—seem to have been semi-Aryanized by their close proximity to the kingdom of Kosala. Although they are believed to have formed the substratum of the population of practically the whole of India, they were submerged by new waves of people with a higher culture and civilization, so that ultimately they represented only the outer fringe of society, while the latter constituted its very basis and foundation.[2]

Some of the nomadic tribes of ancient India were called after the names of birds (Gṛdhras or Suparṇas) on account of their migratory habits.[3] In the Rāmāyaṇa age, the Gṛdhras frequented the Western Ghats and the western sea-board of the peninsula. They were ruled by the brothers Sampāti and Jaṭāyu, and became politically extinct with their death. No detailed account of this tribe is given in the epic. Jaṭāyu was Daśaratha's friend (III. 14. 3) who offered to watch over Sītā at Pañcavaṭī whenever Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were absent on hunting excursions. He was mortally wounded while giving fight to Rāvaṇa when the latter was flying away with Sītā, and was cremated by Rāma as though he were one of his near relatives (III. 68. 31). That the Gṛdhras had adopted some of the Aryan rituals and ceremonies is evident from the fact that Sampāti offered oblations of water to the manes of his deceased brother (IV. 60. 1).

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, during their wanderings in search for Sītā, are said to have arrived at the hermitage of one Śabarī. Apparently, she belonged to the tribe of Śabaras who lived on the banks of the Pampā lake. Their main occupation was hunting. They are represented now by a tribe of the same name inhabiting the hills of Madhya Pradesh.[4] The story of Śabarī is typical of a non-Aryan tribe fully influenced by Aryan culture. She is styled as a Śramaṇī who led the pious and virtuous life of a Saṁnyāsī (nun) and considered herself blessed by her contact with the Aryan prince (III. 74).

The Yakṣas, insignificant from the point of view of numbers and influence, were noted for their extraordinary beauty and physical strength. They and the Rākṣasas were probably kindred races and the epic furnishes several instances of marriage alliances between them. Kubera, the king of the Yakṣas, is said to have been a stepbrother of Rāvaṇa, both having descended from Viśravā. However, it was Rāvaṇa who, fired with imperialistic motives, raised the banner of enmity against the Yakṣas. Laṅkā originally belonged to Kubera

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[1] See G. Ramdas : *The Aboriginal Tribes in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Man in India*, vol. v, 1925, pp. 28-55).

[2] R. C. Majumdar : *History of Bengal*, vol. ii; p. 557.

[3] A. C. Das : *Ṛgvedic India*, p. 148.

[4] S. V. Viswanatha : *Racial Synthesis of Hindu Culture*, p. 86.

(VII. 11. 7), who subsequently vacated it in favour of Rāvaṇa (VII. 11. 32). At first, the two races probably lived in the South of India from where the Yakṣas were gradually ousted and driven towards the North by their more powerful brethren.[1] Later Sanskrit books describe the Yakṣas as semi-divine.

Another tribe, perhaps contemporaneous with the Yakṣas, was the Nāgas, with the serpent as their totem. The Nāgas rose to prominence in South India ; some parts of Laṅkā and Malabar were the territories occupied by them. They were probably a seafaring tribe.[2] The Rāmāyaṇa regards Surasā as the progenitor of the Nāgas and the ocean as their home (V. 1. 73, 137). It is said that the act of Hanumān's crossing the sea was witnessed by them (V. 1. 84). Nāga women were renowned for their beauty, and many of their girls were abducted by Rāvaṇa (V. 12. 22), who stormed their capital city, Bhogavatī, and defeated Vāsuki, Takṣaka, Śaṅkha and Jaṭī, some of the famous Nāga chiefs (VII. 23. 5 ; VI. 7. 9 ; III. 32. 14). Later, the Nāgas apparently mingled with the Ceras who rose to prominence at the beginning of the Christian era.[2]

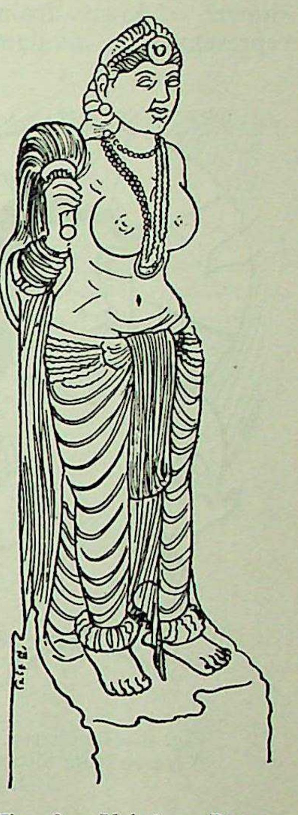

Fig. 3. Yakṣī ; Patna, Maurya, fifth-fourth century B.C. (Press Information Bureau, Government of India).

As for the Asuras, the Rāmāyaṇa distinguishes between them and the Rākṣasas, though both these have been described as identical in later mythology. The Asuras were the sons of Diti, the co-wife of Aditi, mother of the Devas. The Asuras were hostile to the Aryan sages and were meat-eaters and persecutors of the Brāhmaṇas (III. 11. 60, 63). Vātāpi and Ilvala, their chiefs, were annihilated by Agastya (III. 11). The sages of the Daṇḍaka forest requested Rāma to extirpate the Asuras (I. 1. 43-4). Described as the denizens of Pātāla and defenders of *adharma*, they were hostile both to the Devas and the Rākṣasas (V. 1. 93 ; IV. 35. 13). Daśaratha is said to have led an expedition against the Asuras in the Daṇḍaka forest ; it was then, he is said to have granted two boons to Kaikeyī for having saved his life, which later proved fateful (II. 9. 11-7). Sampāti, the Gṛdhra chief, witnessed a struggle between the Devas and the Asuras (IV. 58. 13). Asuras are said to have gone into raptures when Rāvaṇa dropped down senseless on being struck by Hanumān (VI. 59. 115-6).

Among other tribes mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa are the Devas, Gandharvas, Cāraṇas, Siddhas, Kinnaras and Apsarās. They are generally mentioned together whenever the poet intends to suggest a great concourse of people gathered to witness some memorable event. The Devas are generally identified with the gods of heaven, but in the Rāmāyaṇa they are also found inhabiting earthly abodes and wooing earthly maidens. They were allotted a share in Aryan sacrifices. The Rākṣasas were their arch-enemies, and the Devas always manoeuvred to bring about their destruction.

The Gandharvas were the divine minstrels. There is hardly a happy incident described without songs by the Gandharvas, the dance of the Apsarās and the shower of flowers from the heavens. The Kinnaras were an effeminate race always represented as indulging in amorous sports. The Siddhas and Cāraṇas are often depicted as the denizens of aerial regions, engaged in paying compliments to the performers of valorous deeds.

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[1] C. V. Vaidya : *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 99.

[2] V. R. R. Dikshitar : *South India in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Proceedings of VII Oriental Conference*, 1933).

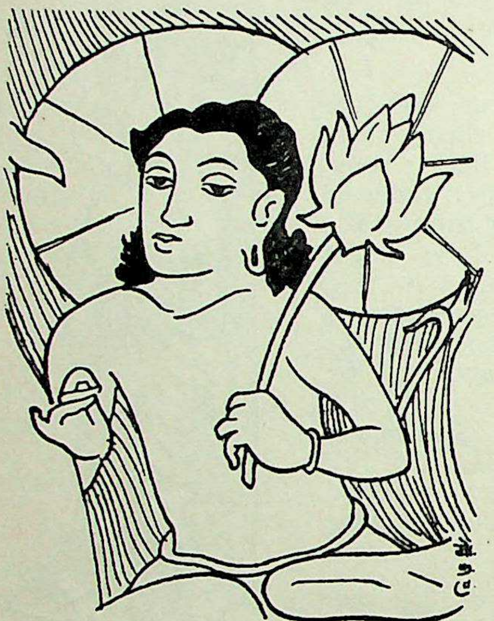

Fig. 4. Gandharva.

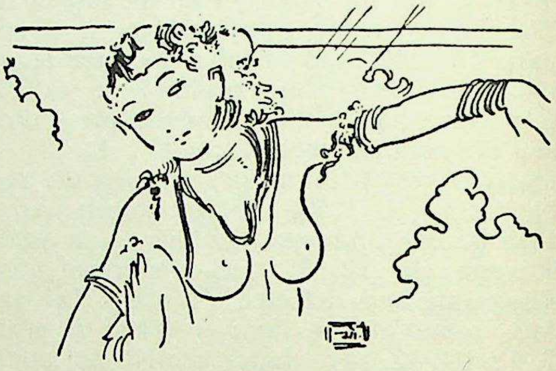

Fig. 5. Dancing Apsarā.

A fresco from Śittannavāśal cave temple (South India) ; Pallava, seventh century A.D. (Press Information Bureau, Government of India).

The Apsarās are frequently referred to in the Rāmāyaṇa. They were in fact courtezans who were accorded by popular imagination a semi-divine status for their superior beauty and accomplishments. Mythologically, the Apsarās are described as springing from the Churning of the Ocean, but the significant fact is that they were accepted neither by the gods nor by the Asuras as wives. In consequence, they came to be known as women of easy virtue (*sādhāraṇāh*, I. 45. 35). Rāvaṇa had ravished several Apsarās (VI. 13. 11-2 ; VII. 26. 41). There are instances of an Apsarā having liaison with several Devas and similarly of a Deva wooing several Apsarās (VII. 56. 15-6 ; 26. 40). The character of these Apsarās as courtezans is well brought out by the episode of Rambhā's ravishment by Rāvaṇa who significantly remarked that the Apsarās had no husbands (VII. 26. 40). According to mythological traditions, the Apsarās, like their counterparts, the Valkyries of Scandinavian mythology, provide entertainment to heroes fallen in battle when they are received in the paradise of Indra (IV. 20. 13 ; 24. 34). They are often depicted as descending on earth to distract ascetics and sages from penance and meditation, and deprive them of the power they would otherwise have acquired through unbroken austerities. They were highly proficient in the arts of music and dance, which they usually employed successfully to captivate the hearts of men.

CHAPTER II

THE RĀKṢASAS

Vālmīki has concerned himself with the delineation mainly of the Aryan civilization of northern India. Incidentally, he throws light also on the culture of other races in whose contact the Aryans came in their trek towards the South. These races, though sufficiently advanced in civilization, were really the aboriginal races of India, subsequently transformed into good or evil spirits according as they allied themselves with or opposed the Aryans.[1] It can, however, be assumed that they were primitive Dravidians who carved out kingdoms of their own and had their own culture and polity. Among these tribes figure prominently the Rākṣasas and Vānaras. Names of some kingdoms such as the Āndhra, Puṇḍra, Cola, Pāṇḍya and Kerala are also found in the epic, but no details are furnished about them (IV. 41. 12). This was because the poet dealing with a particular route that led to Laṅkā had no occasion to refer to these kingdoms in any detail.[2]

Politically, the Rāmāyaṇa bears the first well-documented account of the Rākṣasas and Aryans pitted against each other in vigorous opposition. This has occasioned the depiction of the Rākṣasa civilization at some length in the epic. Though the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas also make mention of the Rākṣasas, culturally, their account is not so important inasmuch as the Rākṣasas had become a declining or extinct force during those times. It was the Rāmāyaṇa period that witnessed the zenith of their glory as well as the point of their descent, and Vālmīki's account of the Rākṣasas has a special value.

Three distinct clans of the Rākṣasas,[3] each having its own lineage, are clearly implied in the Rāmāyaṇa, though they are all known by the common appellation of Rākṣasas. The first is the Virādha clan who lived near the northern end of the Daṇḍaka forest. Virādha, their representative, claimed that the clan had descended from Java and Śatahṛdā. He bore a horrible appearance and met his death at the hands of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (III. 2-3). The second clan was of the Dānavas, so called because they were the offspring of Danu. Kabandha, who had a queer appearance and lived upon every creature that came across him, was the representative of this class. On his death, his corpse was burnt in a pit by Lakṣmaṇa (III. 69, 72). The Dānavas were hostile to the Laṅkā tribe of Rākṣasas. Rāvaṇa is described as an enemy of the Devas and the Dānavas, and as a slayer of the lord of Dānavas. Except for the funeral customs, nothing is given in the epic about these two clans. The third clan, known as Rākṣasas or Rakṣas, was the strongest and most cruel, comprising the inhabitants of Laṅkā under the rule of Rāvaṇa, the descendant of Pulastya and Diti. The Rākṣasas of Laṅkā are fully dealt with by Vālmīki, especially in the Sundarakāṇḍa which provides a substantial account of their social life in all its diverse aspects.

In the Uttarakāṇḍa,[4] Agastya gives the following account of the pre-Rāvaṇa history of the Rākṣasas : Prajāpati, having produced the waters, created beings for

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1. C. V. Vaidya : Op. cit., p. 94.
2. V. R. R. Dikshitar : Op. cit.
3. See G. Ramdas : *The Aboriginal Tribes in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Man in India*, v, pp. 28ff).
4. See cantos 4-11.

their protection. Some of them who were hungry cried : "We will protect ;" others who were not hungry said : "We will sacrifice." Brahmā gave the name Rākṣasas to the former and Yakṣas to the latter.

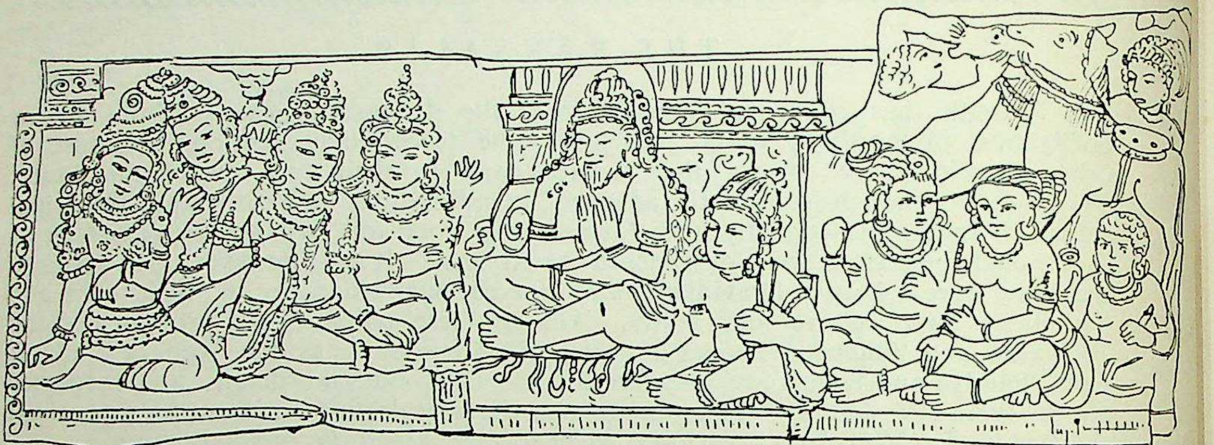

Fig. 6. King Daśaratha performing sacrifice for the birth of sons ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

In the line of the Rākṣasas, there was a renowned king named Vidyutkeśa, who married Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā, the daughter of Sandhyā. They had a son, Sukeśa, whom lustful Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā abandoned as soon as he was born. Sukeśa, however, survived by the grace of Śiva and Pārvatī, who bestowed upon him a long life and an aerial vehicle. Sukeśa had three sons, Mālyavān, Sumālī and Mālī, who grew up to be fierce and fiery warriors. They attacked both Suras and Asuras who, being unable to face them, fled. With the help of their Rākṣasa followers, they occupied the inaccessible Laṅkā and became invulnerable to their enemies. The gods complained to Viṣṇu and sought his aid. Viṣṇu agreed and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Rākṣasas who, dreading his might, abandoned Laṅkā with their wives and followers and settled down in Rasātala among the tribe of Sālakaṭaṅkaṭās.

In course of time, Sumālī (the second son of Sukeśa) left Pātāla for the plains. There, his daughter, Kaikasī, waited on Viśravā at the fire-kindling time and begged of him an offspring. Subsequently, she gave birth to the blue-black Rāvaṇa, mighty Kumbhakarṇa, a Goliath among mortals, Śūrpaṇakhā with an ugly face and, lastly, Vibhīṣaṇa, pleasing to the gods who acclaimed his birth. Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa were wicked by nature, while Vibhīṣaṇa developed into a good-natured youth of studious habits. Rāvaṇa practised long and intensive penance, and Brahmā, the Creator, bestowed on him the boon of being unconquerable by the gods. Instigated by his maternal grandfather, Sumālī, Rāvaṇa forced Kubera to relinquish Laṅkā which thereafter became the capital city of the Rākṣasa principality. Under Rāvaṇa the Rākṣasas, with their enormous material resources, succeeded in carving out a dominion in maritime and peninsular India.

It is thus clear that, prior to the occupation of Laṅkā by Rāvaṇa, the Rākṣasas had a chequered existence. From the mythical account of their origin, it may be inferred that they lived on the sea-coast and guarded the waters, and that, unlike the Yakṣas, they were characterized by great voracity ; in other words, they were ferocious cannibals. Their principal habitat was the southern sea-coast of India. Traces of this race of cannibals are still to be found in the Andamans, Borneo, Sunda and other islands in the Indian Ocean. Again, on his mother's side, Rāvaṇa was born of the race of Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā—a name which bears undoubtedly an aboriginal ring about it. It can, therefore, be assumed that a race of cannibals distinguished by that name occupied Ceylon in the days of Agastya.[1]

After getting hold of the impenetrable fortress of Laṅkā, Rāvaṇa embarked upon an unscrupulous campaign of ravage and conquest throughout the then known world. He started by a ferocious attack on the Yakṣas on whom he inflicted an utter defeat. He humiliated Kubera in a personal combat and seized his renowned Puṣpaka as a war trophy. After ravaging the Mānuṣyaloka, Rāvaṇa attacked the Yamapurī and, directing his plane (*vimāna*) towards Rasātala, passed over the ocean. On the way, he stormed Bhogavatī of Vāsuki. Next he went to Maṇinmayī of Nivātakavaca, but, after some fighting, made friends with him on the intervention of Brahmā. Then he came to Aśmanagara of Kāliya Daitya and subdued him. Finally, his plane reached the abode of Varuṇa, situated by the side of Kṣīrasāgara. After defeating the sons of Varuṇa, he returned to Laṅkā by the same way he went. This whirlwind campaign in the Pātālas would appear to resemble a modern aerial raid, also terminates as suddenly.

Rāvaṇa then directed his attention to the conquest of Indraloka. In alliance with his brother-in-law, Madhu, he invaded the kingdom of the Devas and there ensued a terrific battle between the gods and the Rākṣasas. Meghanāda, the son of Rāvaṇa, through subtle tactics, caused havoc in the ranks of the gods and succeeded in apprehending alive their king, Indra. This event made Rāvaṇa feared and respected throughout the three worlds. The intervention of Brahmā alone could effect the release of the king of the gods.

Vālī, the king of the Vānaras, was perhaps the only person among the non-Aryan tribes who successfully challenged the might of the Rākṣasa imperialist. Vālī is said to have "kept the Rākṣasa bound under his arms and carried him like a beast to all the four oceans" (VII. 34. 37). Rāvaṇa acknowledged the superior might of his adversary and took the prudent step of entering into a life-long friendship with him. Vālī was thus justified in his boast before Rāma that, if approached, he could have "brought the abductor of your wife with a rope round his neck" (IV. 17. 49-50). In fact, it was Vālī who checked Rāvaṇa's power in the Deccan.

Of far greater significance was the hostility of the Rākṣasas against the Aryans. Vālmīki represents the two as constantly at feud with each other and records several instances of conflicts between them even before the great Rāma-Rāvaṇa conflict. Rāvaṇa, after his campaign in Rasātala, had posted the brothers Khara and Dūṣaṇa with an army of 14,000 Rākṣasas at Janasthāna (VII. 24. 36-42), his northernmost outpost on the upper reaches of the Godāvarī, for the purpose of carrying raids into the heart of the Gangetic plain. Rāvaṇa's conquests extended over parts of northern India also. His nephew, Lavaṇa, was the ruler of Madhupurī in the valley of the Yamunā. Tāṭakā and her son, Mārīca, Rāvaṇa's kinsmen, occupied the tract between the Gaṅgā and the Sone, known at that time as Malada and Karūṣa (I. 24-5). From the disturbances caused by the Rākṣasas in the sacrifice of Viśvāmitra (I. 19. 4-6), and the performance of austerities by Vāmana at Siddhāśrama in order that he might succeed in conquering Bali (I. 29), it appears that the Rākṣasas used to overrun the country as far north as the southern banks of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā.

In his zeal for world domination, Rāvaṇa did not spare even the kings of Āryāvarta. Kings like Duṣyanta, Suratha, Gādhi, Gaya and Purūravā, all lay helpless before the might of the Rākṣasa depredator. It was only Anaraṇya, the king of Ayodhyā and an ancestor of Rāma, who could not brook the overweening

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1. See C. V. Vaidya : Op. cit., pp. 99-100.

pride of Rāvaṇa and challenged him to a duel in which, however, Anaraṇya was worsted (VII. 19). The glorious sun of Aryan superiority was thus completely clouded before the brute force of the Rākṣasa, so much so that King Daśaratha acknowledged before Viśvāmitra his inability to withstand Rāvaṇa in battle (I. 20. 20). Kārtavīrya Arjuna, the king of Māhiṣmatī, was the solitary instance of an Aryan king who successfully braved the power of Rāvaṇa. The Haihaya king defeated him in a *dvandva-yuddha* (duel), bound him up with his arms and carried him as a war booty into his capital (VII. 32). However, out of regard for the venerable sage Pulastya, the grandfather of Rāvaṇa, the king condescended to release the captive Rākṣasa and then entered into a solemn friendship with him.

The main cause of conflict between the Aryans and the Rākṣasas was their attempt to pierce into the "pale" of each other. While the Rākṣasas wanted to extend their sphere of influence and political domination into the Indian sub-continent, the Aryans, on their part, attempted to push to the south of India into the dense jungles of the Rākṣasa sphere and bring them under their sway. A formidable obstacle to the penetration of the Aryans to southern India was the impassable Vindhya range. The credit of overcoming it, however, was reserved for Agastya who was undoubtedly the pioneer of settling the Aryans in the South proper. He penetrated deep into the country, crossed the Vindhya range (III. 11. 85) and established a colony at Daṇḍakāraṇya on the northern banks of the Godāvarī near Janasthāna, and thus almost freed the intervening territory from the Rākṣasa pest (III. 11. 81). Many sages and Brāhmaṇas followed Agastya to the South, and in Rāma's time there were many hermitages flourishing in the Deccan to the north of the Godāvarī.

Though isolated conflicts between the Aryans and the Rākṣasas took place in several parts of the country, the regions around the upper courses of the Godāvarī, where the Aryan colony of Daṇḍakāraṇya and the Rākṣasa outpost of Janasthāna were in close proximity, constituted the main theatre of their battles. Daśaratha is said to have led several expeditions to the Daṇḍakas. The Rākṣasas created havoc throughout the territory extending from the Mandākinī (Citrakūṭa) to the Pampā river (III. 6. 17). With the advent of Rāma into the political firmament of India, the mantle of fighting the Rākṣasas, which, with the defeat of Indra, had fallen upon Agastya, was transferred by him to Rāma who was unquestionably the greatest hero of the age. From his very adolescence, he employed his power and arms to the protection of the Aryan hermits against the inroads of the Rākṣasas, as is evident from the fact that, when barely sixteen, he accompanied Viśvāmitra to guard over his sacrifices. His advent into Daṇḍakāraṇya was everywhere hailed as a great boon by the Brāhmaṇa settlements who were subject to constant harassment by the cannibalistic Rākṣasas. His conflict with Rāvaṇa, provoked by Lakṣmaṇa's maltreatment of Śūrpaṇakhā and aggravated by the demon's kidnapping his beloved consort, was the culminating point in the continued strained relations between the two races; and, after the annihilation of Rāvaṇa in the war of Laṅkā, the Rākṣasas ceased to be a force worth reckoning in the political field of India.

The conventional picture of a Rākṣasa, prevalent in our own day and given in the epic and purāṇic records, represents him as a hideous creature with black corpulent body, dishevelled hair, protruding tongue, eyes like burning red balls, sharp claws, twisted teeth, an awfully forward chin and huge arms. Some of the Rākṣasas are described as frightfully hideous which defies description as in the case of Kabandha—a headless trunk with one eye in the chest, a horrible mouth in the belly and two sprawling arms (III. 69. 26-32).

The hideousness of the Rākṣasa women was no less revolting. Tāṭakā is depicted as bearing a frightful appearance (I. 25. 13). The Rākṣasī Ayomukhī had a huge form, with an ugly face, a long belly, sharp teeth, rough skin, and a fearful, uncouth, terrible appearance (III. 69. 11-2). Sītā, while in prison in Laṅkā, was surrounded by a number of women of the most distressing deformities in order to terrify her into submission (V. 17).

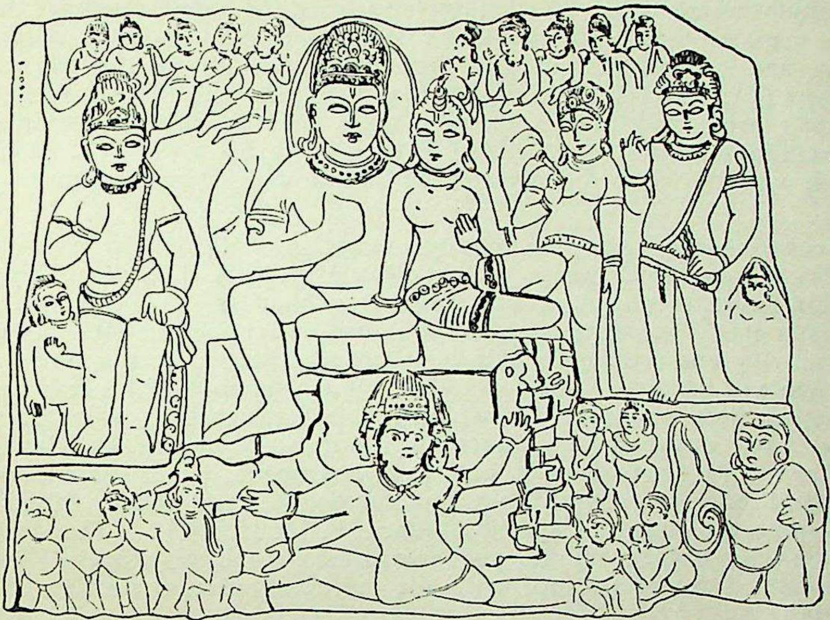

Fig. 7. Rāvaṇa attempting to move Kailāsa with Śiva and Pārvatī ; Ellora, Kailāsa temple, eighth century A.D. (Press Information Bureau, Government of India).

However, the passages supporting the popular conception about the hideousness of the Rākṣasas are infrequent in the Rāmāyaṇa, and they are otherwise represented mostly as ordinary mortals. The poet invested the Rākṣasas with these terrible forms probably because they were the enemies of the Aryan race.[1] Mythological dragons and fiends have always been assigned hideous and unnatural forms. From the reference to Sītā being surrounded by terrible-looking Rākṣasīs in the Aśoka park, it might seem possible that Rāvaṇa had such ugly and uncouth deformities of nature in his service,[2] and the impression which a number of such deformed beings constantly surrounding her must have left on captive Sītā's mind should have led subsequently to an exaggerated notion about the hideous looks of the Rākṣasas and Rākṣasīs.[3]

In any case, the Rākṣasas were a strong race of men, tall in stature and immense in dimensions. They were no doubt dark in complexion like most of the modern inhabitants of southern India. Vālmīki frequently delights in bringing into bold relief the darkness of the Rākṣasa colour by the side of the fair Aryans (III. 52. 23). Yet the Rākṣasas were far from being ugly or uncouth. They had regular, striking and often handsome features. The epic often refers to comely beautiful Rākṣasī women in Laṅkā (V. 18. 26). Hanumān saw both comely and ugly men and women in his nocturnal progress through Laṅkā (V. 2. 20). Mandodarī, the senior queen of Rāvaṇa, was an extraordinarily handsome woman who at once attracted the atten-

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1. Griffith opines that the poet applied the hated name of Rākṣasas to an abhorred and hostile people, and that this denomination is here rather an expression of hatred than a real historical name. (Introduction to his translation of the Rāmāyaṇa, p. 1).
2. Even in the palace of Kaikeyī at Ayodhyā were in employ ugly, humpbacked and dwarf women (*kubjāvāmanikāyutam*, II. 10. 13).
3. C. V. Vaidya : Op. cit., p. 104.

tion of Hanumān while reconnoitering Rāvaṇa's harem in search of Sītā (V. 10. 52). Rāvaṇa himself had an impressive personality (VI. 111. 34-6).

That the Rākṛasas were of human form is corroborated by a passage in the Yuddhakāṇḍa where Rāma is said to have asked the Vānaras never to assume the form of a man, so that there would be seven men only on their side including Vibhīṣaṇa and his followers and that they could safely kill whoever else might be in human form (VI. 37. 33-5). This shows that Vibhīṣaṇa and all the other Rākṣasas in Rāvaṇa's army had human forms. Again, the fact that Hanumān was led to suspect Mandodarī, the Rākṣasī wife of Rāvaṇa, to be Sītā herself (V. 10. 53), shows that there was no great difference in the features of Rākṣasas and ordinary human beings.

For the modern reader, the popular conception of Rāvaṇa as a monster with ten heads (*daśānana*) and twenty arms (*viṁśatibhujah*) is difficult to comprehend. This notion has taken such deep root that it has found its way in popular parlance as well as in art. Specimens of ancient sculpture depict Rāvaṇa with myriad heads and arms. Any crooked picture of a human being with ten faces is taken to represent the figure of Rāvaṇa. This conception, though supported by a few passages in the Rāmāyaṇa (leaving out the Uttarakāṇḍa), is contradicted by a number of descriptive sketches in which he appears as a normal being. When Hanumān saw Rāvaṇa for the first time asleep in his inner apartment, he found his two arms, bearing gold bracelets, spread out like the flag-staff of Indra. Hanumān also speaks of his one big mouth and only one face (V. 10. 15, 24-5). The commentator observes on this passage : "As the poet speaks here of the two arms of Rāvaṇa, it is to be understood that he assumed ten heads and twenty arms at the time of fighting" (V. 10. 21).

It can be seen that even this limitation is not adhered to. When Rāvaṇa made advances to Sītā (fig. 8), she indignantly repulsed him and, in course of upbraiding him in scathing terms, said : "O thou vile one, as thou didst cast thy grim, ferocious, copper-coloured eyes upon me, why did they not (start out of their sockets and) fall down on earth ?" (V. 22. 18). Here also the dual number is used and this is

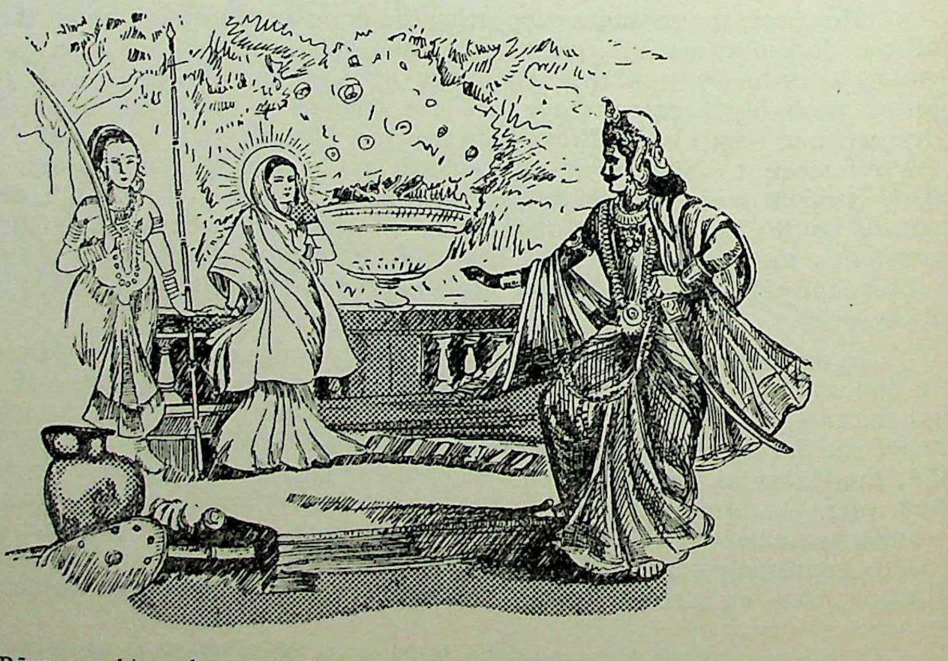

Fig. 8. Rāvaṇa making advances to Sītā, by Deolaliker (Courtesy : Gita Press, Gorakhpur).

repeated in the couplets that follow. Thereupon Rāvaṇa, rolling his grim eyes, looked at Sītā and stood before her in all his glory with his fully-formed arms "like unto Mount Mandāra with its two peaks" (V. 22. 27). Again, when the Rākṣasīs reported the doings of Hanumān to Rāvaṇa, he blazed with anger like the fire of a funeral pyre, and drops of tears fell from the two eyes of that angry one like drops of oil from two burning lamps (V. 42. 23).

The observation of the commentator that Rāvaṇa put on ten heads and twenty arms on the battle-field is not borne out by the Yuddhakāṇḍa. There is no indication of it in the highly rhetorical description of him when he set out to meet the besieging host. At the very first sight of Rāvaṇa, Sugrīva rushed upon him and, in the wrestling bout that followed between the two, Rāvaṇa caught hold of him by his two arms and dashed him to the ground ; whereupon Sugrīva, springing up forthwith like a ball, caught hold of Rāvaṇa by his two arms and knocked him to the ground (VI. 40. 13). In his first encounter with Lakṣmaṇa, the latter was felled to the ground and rendered unconscious by the spear hurled at him. Rāvaṇa tried to lift him with his two arms but failed (VI. 59. 109). After the death of his son, Indrajit, when Rāvaṇa marched out to give a last-ditch fight to Rāma, his left eye quivered and his left arm trembled ominously (VI. 95. 45). In the duel that followed, Rāma cut off the head of Rāvaṇa shining with a flashing crown. Another grew in its place ; this too was cut off, and so on till a hundred heads were cut off in succession ; in each case the singular number is used (VI. 107. 54-7). In many other passages of the epic, Rāvaṇa is described as having only one head. Vibhīṣaṇa also refers to the two hands of Rāvaṇa at his death, while the widowed wives in their lamentations frequently speak of his two arms, a single head and face.

There is, however, one celebrated passage in which Rāvaṇa is described as having ten heads and twenty arms. In the vivid description that follows Hanumān's being brought tied into the presence of Rāvaṇa, after he had ravaged the Aśoka grove, he beholds Rāvaṇa conspicuous with ten heads and twenty arms, with bracelets and excellent sandal paste. The commentator's note on this text again is : "It is to be understood that when Hanumān saw him, Rāvaṇa assumed a terrible form as he did in war" (V. 49. 6). But actually he did no such thing.

The word *daśagrīva*, meaning one with ten necks, is constantly used for Rāvaṇa as a sort of permanent epithet. It occurs in Sītā's reproaches to Rāvaṇa immediately after she has spoken of his two eyes (V. 22. 18). The legend that Rāvaṇa had ten heads, twenty eyes and twenty arms, grew undoubtedly out of this epithet and was intended to convey the idea that he was a warrior of unsurpassed prowess, or that he possessed various siddhic powers. Such epithets have been used in the epic in a metaphorical sense and are "a good illustration of those curious transformations in which what was once rhetorical becomes by slow degrees real in popular belief."[1] Rāvaṇa probably had a big head and a big neck as many powerful men have, and perhaps on account of this he was called *daśagrīva*, a man having a neck as large as ten necks put together. Similarly, the word *daśānana* or *daśaśīrṣa* simply signified that he had access to the ten quarters of the globe, or that he wore ten crowns or ten-headed crowns (head-gems) in token of his vaunted conquests in the ten quarters of the globe and his paramountcy.[2] The word *daśa* (ten) is often used in this sense and there is another example of it in the name of Daśaratha. Now, this word could not possibly mean that Rāma's father had only ten chariots or that he rode in ten chariots simultaneously. Perhaps it conveys that he had a chariot which was as big as ten ordinary chariots, or more probably he was a car-warrior equal to ten such, or his chariot had access to the ten quarters of the globe. It was thus a name involving a comparison, a simile. In the same way, *daśagrīva* or *daśānana*was a name based on simile. As ages rolled by, the simile was forgotten and it came to be believed that Rāvaṇa had actually ten necks and ten heads.[1]

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[1] C. V. Vaidya : op. cit., p. 145.

[2] N. C. Das : *A Note on the Antiquity of the Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 11.

One of the chief factors which must have given rise to the popular distorted idea about the form of the Rākṣasas was their cannibalism. They had a savage relish for human flesh ; hence their epithet *nara-māṁsāśinaḥ* (III. 72. 23). The Rākṣasī Tāṭakā is called a *puruṣādī* (I. 25. 13), one desirous of eating a human being. She is said to have rushed with a roar at Agastya, eager to devour him (I. 25. 11). Mārīca used to roam over the Daṇḍakas feasting on the flesh of sages (III. 38. 3). Hanumān, failing to spot Sītā in Laṅkā, suspected that she had been devoured by Rāvaṇa or his women (V. 13. 11-2). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, the voracious ministers of Rāvaṇa are shown as having eaten raw the ministers of Kārtavīrya Arjuna (VII. 32. 32). The Rākṣasa Virādha was particularly fond of the flesh of sages (III. 2. 13). The Rākṣasī guards, who had been ordered to subjugate Sītā by any means, delighted over the prospect of regaling themselves with Sītā's limbs and *surā* (liquor), blood (V. 24. 44). Besides human flesh, the Rākṣasas fed on all kinds of other flesh. They were all meat-eaters and are frequently termed as *piśitāśana* and *māṁsāśana* or eaters of flesh. The eleventh canto of the Sundarakāṇḍa gives a detailed description of the various meat preparations included in Rāvaṇa's *menu*.

The Rākṣasas—men and women alike—were very much addicted to drink, and human blood was a favourite drink with these cannibals (*māṁsa-śoṇita-bhojanāḥ*, VI. 60. 23). Virādha had vowed to drink the blood of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (III. 2. 14). Khara sent fourteen Rākṣasas "to slay Sītā and the two men with her" and bring their blood for his sister to drink (III. 19. 25). Jars of blood were kept ready for Kumbhakarṇa's gratification after his seasonal slumber (VI. 60. 33).

In matters of etiquette, the Rākṣasas followed the Aryans. Kumbhakarṇa, before setting out for battle, embraced his brother Rāvaṇa, went round him and bowed (VI. 65. 32). When Rāvaṇa first set out for his battle with Rāma, he was eulogized with sacred hymns (VI. 59. 8). Vibhīṣaṇa, after deserting Rāvaṇa, came to Rāma, greeted him with bent head, and casting his looks down, stood bowed before Rāma (VI. 19. 1-2). When Rāvaṇa visited Mārīca, the latter welcomed him with *āsana* (séat), water for *pādya* and *arghya* (washing and sipping) and entertained him with superb meats and drinks (III. 31. 36-7).

The law of primogeniture does not seem to have been followed by the Rākṣasas in the matter of succession, as Rāvaṇa became king through his mother's line.

Burial was the traditional practice for disposing the dead, as is clear from Virādha having been buried in a pit which was covered with stones by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (III. 4. 22). Kabandha's funeral was a compromise between the Rākṣasa and the Aryan ways. The body was cremated after the Aryan fashion and the remains were then buried (III. 71. 24-32 ; 72. 1-3). The corpses of common soldiers were allowed to be eaten up by vultures and beasts of prey. Rākṣasa heroes used to vow that they would offer the bodies of their enemies to the vultures (III. 19. 10).

The Aryanized Vibhīṣaṇa at first did not consent to give the honour of an Aryan cremation to Rāvaṇa who had renounced *dharma*. But Rāma evidently intended to introduce Aryan customs into the Rākṣasa community by giving Vedic (*pitṛmedha*) rites to Rāvaṇa. So, at Rāma's insistence, Rāvaṇa's body was cremated according to the Aryan style and, thus, the Rākṣasas were sought to be Aryanized in culture (VI. 111). It is also believed that, Rāvaṇa having attained death at Rāma's hands, his body had become sacred.

As regards marriage customs among the Rākṣasas, their nuptials were solemnized before the holy fire. Mandodarī was offered by her father, Maya, to Rāvaṇa in this manner (VII. 12. 20). The usual form of marriage prevalent among the Rākṣasas was by capture which gave rise to the later Rakṣasa-*vivāha*. Rāvaṇa's own nubile niece, Kumbhīnasī, who had not been provided with a husband by her relations, was abducted and married by Madhu (VII. 25. 25). It appears that a Rākṣasa could marry any woman, married or unmarried. When Rāvaṇa was advised to exercise his animal strength after the manner of cock-fowl in forcing Sītā to share his bed, he said he could not adopt that means as he had been cursed by Brahmā for having committed violence on Puñjikasthalā (VI. 13). This story might mean that social reforms had been introduced among the Rākṣasas at that time. The need for such reforms might have been felt because of the harm done to the woman, even equally by the example presented by the more civilized Aryan community.

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[1] C. V. Vaidya : op. cit., pp. 145-6.

Mixed marriages among the Aryans and the non-Aryans are in evidence. Rāvaṇa wanted to marry Aryan ladies like Sītā (III. 47. 28) and Vedavatī (VII. 17. 22). Besides Rāvaṇa, several others of his kin are said to have sought Vedavatī's hand (VII. 17. 10). Śūrpaṇakhā, a Rākṣasī, wanted to marry an alien like Rāma or Lakṣmaṇa (III. 17-8). Daughters of Rājarṣis, Vipras, Gandharvas and Rākṣasas, urged by love (or lust), voluntarily chose to become the wives of Rāvaṇa (V. 9. 68). Free marriages among the non-Aryan tribes of the South were more common. Tāṭakā was a Yakṣiṇī and her husband an Asura. Her son Mārīca was a Rākṣasa.

Among the religious practices of the Rākṣasas, the *svastyayana* was a popular benedictory rite. Rāvaṇa is said to have sent Kumbhakarṇa and his sons to battle with choice benedictions. Before setting out on his world conquest, he performed the *svastyayana* and then ascended his car. Several Rākṣasa heroes are described as proceeding to the battle-field after performing benedictory ceremonies (VI. 95. 7).

Like the Aryans, the Rākṣasas invariably resorted to the practice of austerities, but their motive was always to acquire mundane powers (unlike the Aryan sages whose aim was to attain spiritual enlightenment and emancipation). The demon Virādha, by virtue of penance, had obtained a boon rendering his body invulnerable to any weapon (III. 3. 6). During the period of austerities, the Rākṣasas practised excruciating self-mortifications, and led pious, truthful and self-controlled lives (VII. 5. 10-1). Mārīca, after he had sown wild oats, practised penance clad in deer skin, bearing a head of matted locks and subsisting on restricted fare (III. 35. 38). Hanumān regarded Rāvaṇa as highly advanced in asceticism (which is the likely allegorical meaning of his seeing ten heads, etc.) as a result of which he had not been ruined even though he had touched Sītā's person (V. 59. 4). But the perennial complaint against the Rākṣasas is that they used the powers gained through austerities for unrighteous and evil purposes. In striking contrast, however, was the solitary instance of the exemplary disposition of Vibhīṣaṇa which, again, bears out that attainment of truth or enlightenment is not the monopoly of a chosen race or creed.

The Rākṣasas also performed sacrifices. They practised chiefly *atharvan* rites, abounding in magic and witchcraft, through which they sought and did derive occult powers to make themselves invincible against their foes. Rāvaṇa is called a great performer of sacrifices (VI. 109. 23). Being himself an *agnihotrin* (fire-worshipper), fire from his *agnihotra* was employed in igniting his funeral pyre (VI. 111. 104). During the thick of the battle of Laṅkā, Indrajit resorted to a mysterious rite to gain (accession of) occult strength. From its description, as given by Vālmīki (VI. 80. 5-16), it is clear that Indrajit's sacrifice was what the *Gītā* terms a *tāmasa yajña*, a base sacrifice.

Nikumbhilā was the titular goddess of the Rākṣasas, and a separate garden was dedicated to her bearing her name in the city of Laṅkā. The Rākṣasī guards of Sītā are depicted as saying : "Bring *surā*, the killer of all anxiety ; regaling ourselves with human flesh, we shall dance before the goddess Nikumbhilā" (V. 24. 44). The sacrifice which Indrajit performed during the battle of Laṅkā was dedicated in honour of this goddess (VI. 82. 25). No precise account about this enigmatic goddess of the Rākṣasas is given by Vālmīki.

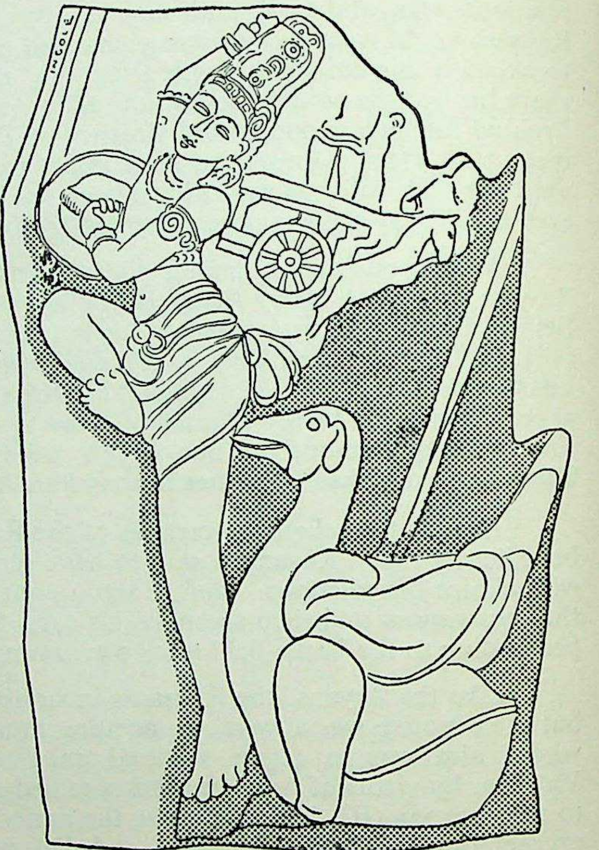

Fig. 9. Rāvaṇa carrying away Sītā, while Jaṭāyu fights to rescue her; Ellora, eight century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Occultists, the Rākṣasas, it is obvious, were generally an educated race. Vedic studies seem to have been much in vogue among them. Thus, Hanumān heard Vedic hymns recited in the Rākṣasa houses and saw people engaged in *svādhyāya* or private studies (V. 4. 13). From the suburban park, Aśoka-vana, he could hear, towards the close of night, the *brahma-ghoṣāḥ* (recitation of sacred texts) of the Brahma-rākṣasas who were learned in the six branches of the Vedas (V. 18. 2). Vibhīṣaṇa, while on way to his brother's palace, heard prayers being chanted by Vedic scholars for the victory of Rāvaṇa ; and he saw Vipras (Brāhmaṇas) versed in the Vedas being honoured by citizens with offerings (VI. 10. 8-9).

The belief that Rāvaṇa was a great Vedic scholar is supported by both the earlier and later portions of the epic. The Uttarakāṇḍa describes him as invoking god Śaṅkara with the hymns of the *Sāmaveda* (VII. 16. 33). At the time of his fall in battle, his brother, Vibhīsaṇa, while lamenting said that Rāvaṇa had been *āhitāgniḥ*, *mahātapāḥ* and *vedāntagaḥ* (VI. 109. 23); *i.e.*, adhering to the Vedic or Brahmanical cult of fire-worship, engaged in high studies and penances, and gone to the farthest end of Vedic studies (or completed them in a thorough manner). When, as his sons and kinsmen were perishing at the city walls before the onslaught of the besieging Vānara hosts, he resolved to make short work of Sītā, an intelligent courtier, Supārśva, thus exhorted him : "How is it that thou, being a *veda-vidyā-vrata-snātaḥ*, hast entertained the foul thought of killing a woman ?" (VI. 92. 60). This means that Rāvaṇa had undergone a course of Vedic studies in some hermitage and, having completed it, had returned to family-life after the ceremonial bath in the usual Vedic manner.

Atikāya, the son of Rāvaṇa from one of his junior queens, is represented as having attended on wise elders, as learned in the Vedas, well-versed in the use of all weapons, and an adept in horse- and elephant- riding and the bending of the bow. He is also said to have been well-versed in politics, diplomacy and such traditional tactics as *sāma*, *dāna*, *daṇḍa* and *bheda* (VI. 71. 28-9). The speech, which Kumbhakarṇa delivered in Rāvaṇa's assembly before setting out to the battle-front, contains reference to *arthaśāstra* and *rājanīti* (VI. 63. 14-6) ; while

Mahodara, another Rākṣasa, expounded the philosophy of the four *puruṣārthas* (objects of life)—*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa* (VI. 65).

That Rāvaṇa and other chiefs spoke Sanskrit is indicated by Hanumān's fears that if he spoke to Sītā in Sanskrit, she might take him to be Rāvaṇa in disguise (V. 30. 18). The Asura brothers, Ilvala and Vātāpi, could speak Sanskrit, the refined speech of priesthood, so well that they could pose as Brāhmaṇas and entertain Brāhmaṇas at feasts (III. 11. 56).

Rāvaṇa's assembly, indeed, consisted of ministers of highest intellect : all-knowing, "intellect-eyed" *amātyas*, and scholars who helped in setting lines of policy (VI. 11. 25). The assembly etiquette was strictly followed and there was no yelling, gossip, nor any lying (VI. 11. 30). Intellect, learning and good breeding were apparently the *sine qua non* of the Rākṣasa court. The capital city of Laṅkā evinced not only a profusion of Vedic learning but also a secular artistic culture, as evidenced by the existence of art-studios (*citra-gṛhas*), night-clubs (*niśā-gṛhas*), sport pavilions (*krīḍā-gṛhas*), art-galleries (*citra-śālās*), creeper-covered garden pavilions (*latā-gṛhas*), flower houses (*puṣpa-gṛhas*), drinking bars or saloons (*āpāna-śālās*), and universal gay dances and sweet songs in three octaves (V. 4. 10-1 ; V. 12). "Life in such an atmosphere must itself have been an education, and the proverb 'whoever went to Laṅkā became a Rākṣasa' had a real foundation, for the Rākṣasa was a cultured man."[1]

The Rākṣasa kingdom of Laṅkā appears to have reached the zenith of material prosperity during the reign of Rāvaṇa. The fortress of Laṅkā, with its impregnable position on the Trikūṭa Hill, was a marvel of a triple fortress of the age.[2] Its architectural planning was superb and its wealth and prosperity, as described by Vālmīki in the Sundarakāṇḍa (cantos 6-11), almost surpasses imagination.

The palace of Rāvaṇa, situated on the top of a mountain, was surrounded by a bright wall, high and strong, guarded by hardened warriors. The palace abounded in splendid courts and gateways, with broad roads for war-chariots and other vehicles to pass through. These thoroughfares were lined on both sides at regular intervals which ivory statues of heroes and were thronged by mounted soldiers. In the outer zones of the palace grounds were located the beautiful residences of the mighty warriors of the ruling class, well furnished, provided with war-chariots and other military equipments, and surrounded by expansive grounds containing enclosures for lovely birds and beasts (private zoos and aviaries) in well-laid-out and artistically planned grounds. No garden was complete without sylvan retreats, bowers and ponds. Nearby were built stables for horses and elephants, and sheds for other conveyances, covered all over with network of gold and other precious metals.

Interspersed, but well planned and aesthetically arranged, were charming bowers and arboreal enclosures, gymnasiums, picture galleries, sporting rooms, dwellings for dalliance during day-time and at night, and wooden mounds or raised platforms of the shape of a mountain. The palace, with flag-staffs hoisted, was filled with enclosures for peacock fights. The treasury inside the palace was well guarded. The royal residence contained rows of several structures having decorated windows made of gold and silver and set with precious gems and with birds in hanging cages. The towers were splendid, resembling mountain peaks. The palace surpassed in beauty the best secular structures and was incomparable in loveliness.

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : *Educational Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p. 100.

[2] See chapter XX.

The bed-chambers used by Rāvaṇa were superb and grand, spotless and spacious. The sleeping apartments were graceful, provided with jewelled staircases, crystal floors and terraces, and decorated with female statues made of ivory and metals set with precious stones. The chambers had jewelled pillars, the floor was heavily carpetted with parti-coloured beautifully designed square carpets and furnished with canopies that matched the furniture. The rooms were always perfumed with sweet-smelling frankincense, their walls decorated with flower garlands, festoons and green foliage—the whole atmosphere being invigorating and delightful. During night they appeared as if in conflagration on account of the bright illumination. In other parts of the palace were quartered dancing halls, music halls, halls for drinking—all well equipped for their particular purpose.

Rāvaṇa's Aśokavāṭikā is compared with Indra's Nandanavana and is described as containing various animals and birds, palaces and mansions, adorned with ponds abounding in beautiful lotuses and water-lilies, provided with many comfortable seats, sylvan retreats and bowers, and arbours with beautiful flowers of all seasons and fruit trees.

The dwellings of the common Rākṣasas in Laṅkā were rich in furnishings, firm-based, with innumerable apartments and garnished with golden moon and crescents. They had graceful crests, variegated windows and raised daises, and were "embellished with rubies and lapis lazulis, seeming to touch the sun, resembling mountains in grandeur and resonant with the cries of *krauñcas* and peacocks and the tinklings of ornaments" (VI. 75. 20-1). While describing the setting of fire to Laṅkā by the Vānaras, the poet refers to the burning of "gates, upper apartments, spacious highways, various by-ways and edifices, mountain-like structures, *aguru* and sweet sandal, pearls and streamy gems, diamonds and corals, linen and fine silk, *āvikas* and various kinds of woollen cloth, vessels of gold, diverse kinds of furniture,

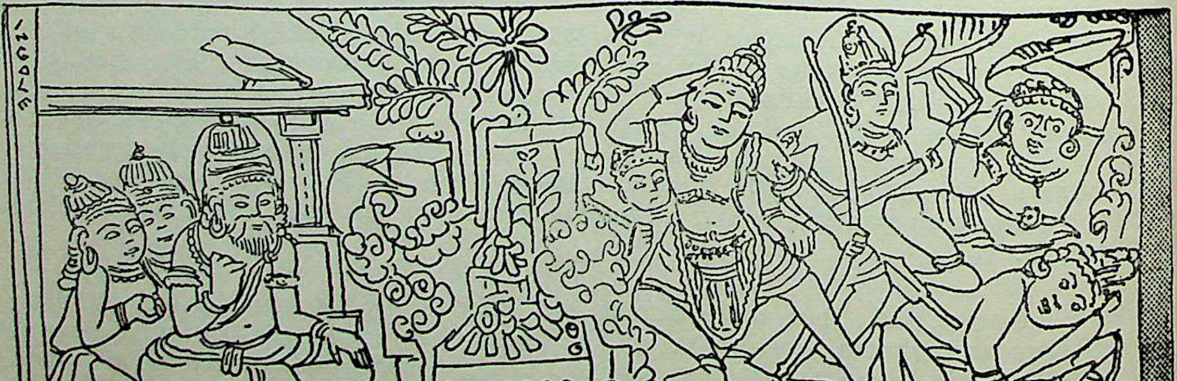

Fig. 10. Viśvāmitra *āśrama*. The hermit makes offering, while Rāma defeats the Rākṣasa Mārīca ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

trappings and ornaments for steeds, cords for tying elephants, burnished ornaments for cars, armours for warriors, blankets, chowries, tiger-skins, musk and other skins, pearls and excellent gems and wreaths, ornaments and attires" (VI. 75. 6-14).

The impressions that Hanumān formed of Laṅkā are perhaps too highly coloured by "the proneness to exaggerate which was natural to those who first witnessed a spectacle so striking the imagination, so new and unexpected."[1] But there is a vein of truth in all this hyperbolic description, though it may appear, at this distance of time, and in the totally altered circumstances of our day, as unreal or imaginary. The abundance of gold and jewels in the Rākṣasa capital is not entirely fabulous ; especially "when we remember what a vast amount of gold the Mexicans had in their possession, when we read that in Peru there was a big temple of the Sun the walls of which were coated with plates of gold, when we find that the now exposed city of Lhāsā possesses a temple situated on a hill the roof of which is covered with gold, we cannot but grant that the Rākṣasas, with an ingenuity and a liking peculiar to the barbarians, had really ornamented the walls and houses of their city, at least here and there, with golden plates. That they must have possessed gold in abundance seems very possible. Southern India and Ceylon in former times were full of gold which was found in the sands of their rivers and in their mines, and gold is even now plentifully found in the mines worked in Mysore State. The fabulous golden Laṅkā, therefore, seems to us to be only an exaggeration and not a mere creation of the poet's fancy."[2]

It was not that the Rākṣasas were bereft of a sense of political morality and wisdom. Both Mārīca and Vibhīṣaṇa tried their best to dissuade Rāvaṇa from keeping Sītā in wrongful confinement and thus provoking a powerful adversary like Rāma. It was only on pain of death that the reluctant Mārīca was driven to become a party to Śūrpaṇakhā's moves (III. 40. 26). The Rākṣasas had also some notion of international equity. Rāvaṇa spared the life of Hanumān because it was pointed out to him that the latter was an ambassador from Rāma and that the person of an ambassador was sacred and inviolable (V. 52. 13). Rāvaṇa's own sense of chivalry is proved by his refraining from the murder of Sītā even when he found his overtures repeatedly rejected.

Kumbhakarṇa tried to dissuade his brother from hostilities by a speech on the right policy for kings as he understood it. His speech (VI. 63. 5-16) should dispel the notion that Kumbhakarṇa was a mere beastly glutton ; on the contrary, he was bold enough to criticize his imperious royal brother and to expose his councillors. It was only out of a sense of political duty that Kumbhakarṇa sided with his erring brother as he found that war was inevitable. Vibhīṣaṇa thought it his duty to warn Rāvaṇa of his impending ruin by pointing out the superiority of Rāma's prowess and the justness of his cause, and advised his brother to conciliate Rāma by handing over Sītā with apologies. When in return for this salutary, though unpalatable, advice Rāvaṇa abused him and called him a traitor (VI. 16), Vibhīṣaṇa showed his sense of moral integrity by deserting his wicked brother and siding with the righteous Rāma.

While the Aryans were far-famed for fair means in warfare, the Rākṣasas were notorious for foul and nefarious methods in bringing about discomfiture of

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1. C. V. Vaidya : op. cit., p. 162.
2. Op. cit.

the enemy. The Rākṣasas are frequently condemned in the Rāmāyaṇa as *kūṭa-yodhinaḥ* (VI. 50. 15) or resorting to deceit in warfare by the employment of fire, poison and magic. *Māyābala* (illusory tactics) was a tower of strength to the Rākṣasas (VI. 50. 48). Mārīca is called *mahā-māyā-viśārada* (III. 36. 13) or supermaster of potent illusory spells. Rāvaṇa was well known for his deceitful tactics in war (VI. 111. 53). Examples of the guileful tactics of the Rākṣasas can be gleaned from the poet's description of the battle of Laṅkā.

The Rākṣasa army was composed of both masked and unmasked men. When Rāvaṇa went to the battle-field for the first time, he is said to have been followed by beings with faces of tiger, horse, camel, stag and other animals (VI. 59. 23). These were Rākṣasa soldiers wearing masks resembling the faces of wild beasts. This was one of the several ways in which the inhabitants of Laṅkā terrified their enemies. Besides, they also appeared in deceptive guises which made it impossible to discern the real from the pretentious.

A sort of definite military organization may, however, be discerned among the Rākṣasas. When Laṅkā was besieged by Rāma, Rāvaṇa's forces were all at rest in the garrison town. They were mobilized by the beating of military drums. Rāvaṇa asked the commanders of his army to assemble the soldiers quickly without revealing to them the reason for mobilization (VI. 32. 43). The Rākṣasa army comprised the fourfold forces of infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots (VI. 33. 22-3) in charge of several *balādhyakṣas* or generals (VI. 95. 23). The gates of the fort of Laṅkā were always well-guarded. The city was furnished with many *kūṭāgāras* (V. 9. 14) which were probably cellars or subterranean passages and hide-outs for soldiers.

Espionage and diplomacy had a recognized place in the Rākṣasa scheme of military tactics. Śūrpaṇakhā emphasized before Rāvaṇa the supreme necessity for a king to keep his system of espionage at its highest working efficiency, since spies alone could endow him with long-range vision (III. 33. 10). After Rāvaṇa had kidnapped Sītā to Laṅkā, he sent eight brave Rākṣasas to keep a close eye on the movements of Rāma, to report duly to him (Rāvaṇa) and not to miss any opportunity for laying him (III. 54. 26-7). *Bheda*, or causing disaffection among enemy troops, was a favourite tactic with the Rākṣasas. Rāvaṇa sent the spy Śuka to alienate Sugrīva from Rāma (VI. 20. 8-15). He also sent several spies, headed by Śuka, Sāraṇa and Śārdūla, to find out the strength, the resources and the manoeuvring of Rāma's army (VI. 29. 19-22). Thus, basically, the Rākṣasa tacties were not much different from what they are in modern wars.

Major Rākṣasa heroes went to the battle-front and fought in chariots.[1] Unlike the Vānaras, the Rākṣasas knew the use of weapons. Indrajit (VI. 73. 48-9), Rāvaṇa (VI. 95. 10), Atikāya (VI. 71. 52) and Mahārakṣa (VI. 70. 21) were expert archers. *Dvandva-yuddha* (individual combats), *bāhu-yuddha* (arms fight), *gadā-yuddha* (mace battle) and *muṣṭi-yuddha* (exchange of blows) were some of the methods of warfare resorted to by the Rākṣasas. They were adept also in air fighting ; an air-battle or *ākāśa-yuddha* that took place between Rāvaṇa and the sons of Varuṇa is described in the Uttarakāṇḍa (VII. 23. 33-43).

The irretrievable defeats the Rākṣasas suffered at the hands of the Aryans, however, show that they were inferior in military equipment and prowess and were no match for the superior Aryan warriors. The Rākṣasas' skill in archery was no match to their superior Aryan rivals (VI. 73. 47-8 ; 95. 10 ; 71. 52 ; 79. 21). Again, the Rākṣasas, though individually strong, formed an unwieldy mass which could not profit by its numbers. It is, therefore, not at all surprising to see the 14,000 (the number may be somewhat exaggerated) Rākṣasas being routed at Janasthāna by Rāma single-handed, and the conclusion stands to reason that the secret of his victory lay in his great mastery in the science of archery and his being thoroughly at home with the tactics of war.[1]

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[1] VI. 95. 33 ; 48. 18 ; 51. 30 ; 59. 8 ; III. 49. 19 : 12. 33 ; V. 45. 3 ; 44. 5.

In spite of the religious character of their rites and the prevalence of learning and education among them, the Rākṣasas had, as a rule, low ethics and revelled in luxury and unrighteous thought and action, and drew destruction upon themselves. Hanumān, marvelling at the sin and splendour of Rāvaṇa, exclaims : "This Rākṣasa is afraid of no sin, yet his splendour is astonishing and his deportment magnificent. In spite of this, those who saw him felt no joy but only fear. Though he was handsome , well-adorned and young, his appearance evoked only horror" (V. 22. 29 ; 49. 17). Why ?—As Hanumān himself remarks : "Alas, had he not entered the path of evil, he would have conquered the three worlds. He is a cruel wretch, inflicting suffering on the good, oppressing all creatures without the least spark of mercy. All his valour and fame are destroyed by his wickedness" (V. 49. 18-9).

The Rākṣasas had acquired an abhorred name throughout the country through their subversive activities against the peace-loving Aryan sages, disturbance of whose sacrifices was a mischief often committed by the Rākṣasas. The demons used to throw away the vessels containing the sacrificial articles, pour water on the sacrificial fire and break vessels cantaining water (II. 116. 17). When Viśvāmitra commenced the performance of his sacrifice, Mārīca and Subāhu approached the sacrificial ground and rained thick blood over the altar (I. 30. 12-3). Rāvaṇa is stigmatized as *naikayajñaviloptāram* (VI. 111. 52), annihilator of many a sacrifice, *dharma-vyavasthā-bhettāram* (*ibid.*), obstrustor of the established religious order, *ucchetāram dharmāṇām* (III. 32. 12) destroyer of righteousness and *prāpta-yajñaharam* (III. 32. 20), destroyer of sacrifices about to be completed. Possessing prodigious strength, he used to take away forcibly from the sacrificial altar the clarified butter sanctified with hymns (III. 32. 19-20). The coming of a Rākṣasa into a sacrificial arena was deemed to be as unwelcome and ominous as of an unclean dog (VII. 18. 6).

The Rākṣasas not only disturbed the religious rites of the Aryans but also resorted to unscrupulous slaughter of the participants. Rāvaṇa was a *brahmaghna* (III. 32. 20) or murderer of the Brāhmaṇas. The Uttarakāṇḍa describes him as invading the Māheśvara sacrifices of King Marutta and "lending full liberty to his vicious appetite for flesh" (V. 5. 8) by devouring the great sages who had assembled there and regaling himself with their blood (VII. 18. 19). When Rāma visited the sages of Daṇḍakāraṇya, they showed him the carcasses of the hermits killed by the cannibals (III. 6. 16). Upon the slaughter of Indrajit at Lakṣmaṇa's hands, the assembled Devas, Gandharvas and Dānavas are said to have joyfully declared that henceforth the Brāhmaṇas would move about fearlessly.

But the most abominable of crimes perpetrated by the Rākṣasas, which made them the scourge of civilized world, was their violence against women. To quote the words of Rāvaṇa himself : "It is the typical vocation (*svadharma*) of the Rākṣasas that they always visit others' wives or kidnap them"

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[1] C. V. Vaidya : op. cit., p. 140.

(V. 20. 5). Kumbhakarṇa was notorious for his devouring propensity, destruction of asylums and outraging of others' wives (VI. 61. 19). The main complaint which the Devas placed before Viṣṇu and which they regarded as the *raison d'etre* for His incarnation on earth was Rāvaṇa's violent kidnapping of women (I. 16. 7). He was a lustful person (*ajitendriya*) whom his own sister called a violator of others' wives (III. 32. 12). His own wife, Mandodarī, was aware how he had brought into his harem Deva, Asura and Aryan girls, kidnapping them from far and near (VI. 111. 53). His campaign of world conquest was invariably accompanied by highway robbery of every fair beauty, married or otherwise, he happened to come across (VII. 24. 1-3). His rape of the Apsarās Puñjikasthalā and Rambhā, his violation of the person of Vedavatī, his abduction of innumerable damsels after slaying their relatives were all acts which evoked but feeble resistance from the Aryans of the time, until with the abduction of Sītā the fury of the mightiest warrior of the land was let loose upon him with fatal consequences for the Rākṣasa race.

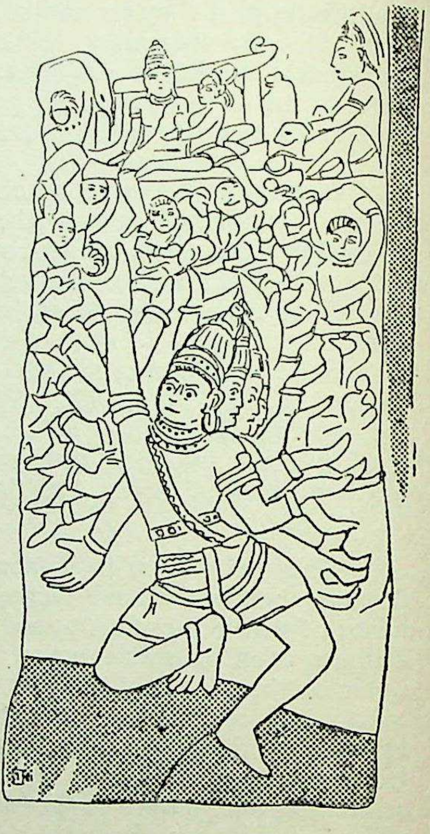

Fig. 11. Rāvaṇa lifting Kailāsa; Pattadkal, eighth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Though the Rākṣasas used to delight in feasting over human flesh, stray evidence is available of amicable relations subsisting between men of Aryan stock and the Rākṣasas. Thus, when Hanumān enteres Rāvaṇa's Aśoka park, he is said to have found there men in high glee amidst sylvan surroundings (V. 14. 8). This may indicate that the Rākṣasas generally ate only such men as were seized or vanquished in battle or against whom they had enmity, and never those settled as part of their society. When Prahasta, Rāvaṇa's commander-in-chief, set out for battle, the Rākṣasas are said to have offered salutations to the Brāhmaṇas engaged in propitiating the holy fire (VI. 57. 21). From this as well as from other practices it is clear that the Rākṣasas had high veneration for the Brāhmaṇa class. The Brāhmaṇas, especially those who were in the service of the Rākṣasa king, evidently enjoyed a secure lodgment and security in his capital.

In other respects, however, the Rākṣasas had a deridingly low estimate of Aryans whom they regarded as mortal and frail and referred to as *mānuṣas* or men. Rāvaṇa was outspokenly contemptuous of men and disdained begging of Brahmā immunity from death at their hands (VI. 8. 2). When Mārīoa advised Rāvaṇa to desist from his plan of kidnapping the wife of the redoubtable hero Rāma, Rāvaṇa scoffed and replied that it was impossible to frighten him by such eulogies of one who was a simpleton, a sinner and a man besides (III. 40. 4). Śūrpaṇakhā strongly rebuked Khara at his failure to kill Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa who were after all human beings (III. 21. 19). Mandodarī considered Sītā nowise her superior or even her equal in point of extraction, beauty or accomplishments to be able to divert her husband's love (VI. 111. 28). Rāvaṇa asked Sītā to withdraw her mind from Rāma, a human being of scant prowess.[1]

An interesting question which now arises is : Who were the Rākṣasas ? According to the estimate of the Rāmāyaṇic Aryans, human beings who had fallen from their their duty (*svadharma*) and were consequently banished (*cyuta*) from the Aryan fold were degraded as Rākṣasas. This notion finds confirmation in instances where men are originally Aryans or non-Rākṣasas but are cursed to become Rākṣasas on account of their anti-social or sacrilegious activities. Tāṭakā was a Yakṣṇī (I. 25. 15), but, when she attempted violence against the saintly personage of Agastya, she was cursed by the sage to turn into a man-eating Rākṣasī, her son, was also condemned to become a Rākṣasa (I. 25. 11-3). When King Kalmāṣapāṣa offered human flesh as food to Vasiṣṭha, the sage cursed him to be born into a man-eating demon (VII. 65. 28). Thus, even an Aryan could be degraded into Rakṣasahood by way of punishment for some heinous crime.

This theory corresponds to some extent with the opinion of some modern scholars. From a study of Vedic literature and rituals prevalent among the Rākṣasas and their attachment to the cults of fire and Śiva, scholars tend to regard them as Aryans who emigrated to the South, settled down in a fertile tract, built up a great civilization and became strong and prosperous beyond description. From the account of the origin of the Rākṣasas, it is gathered that Rāvaṇa was the son of Viśravā and the brother of Vaiśravaṇa, a direct descendant of Brahmā, the Creator. This is what may be regarded as an Aryan origin for the Rākṣasa tribe. But the Rākṣasas grew cruel and fond of luxury when cut away from the purifying influences of the parental polity.[2]

However, it is more plausible to regard the Rākṣasas as some of the earliest inhabitants of southern India and Ceylon who emerged in the Rāmāyaṇa age from a barbarous to a semi-civilized condition. Racially, they were perhaps identical with the Dasyus with whom the Ṛgvedic Aryans were in conflict.[3] From the South Indian standpoint,[4] the Rākṣasas are to be taken as descendants of the aboriginal bowmen and fishermen who carved out a kingdom when they began to increase in numbers. With the passage of time there sprang up frequent and increasing contacts with Āryāvarta. A result of such contact was the adoption of Brahmanism by the Rākṣasas as proved by the existence of Brahma-rākṣasas, *i.e.*, Rākṣasas who were Brāhmaṇas. These Brahma-rākṣasas eventually learnt Sanskrit, donned the priestly garb and performed Vedic rituals and ceremonies.

Towards the southern extremity of India and in the island of Ceylon, there undoubtedly existed, during the Rāmāyaṇa period, a black ferocious race averse to the Aryans and hostile to their mode of worship, some traces of whom are found in Java to this day.[5] Their influence extended over many islands of the Indian archipelago. They played an important part in the events of the world before the rise of Aryan supremacy. The Aryans described the Rākṣasas as monstrous, changing form at will, blood-thirsty and ravenous, just as the Semites represented the races that opposed them as impious, horrible and of monstrous size.

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1. For references in this para, see VII. 10. 20 ; III. 40. 4 ; VI. 111. 28 ; III. 55. 21.
2. K. S. Ramaswami Sastri : *The Aryan Colonies of Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā* (*Indian Culture*, vol. v, pp. 195 ff.).
3. T. K. Venktaraman : *The Rākṣasas* (*K. V. Rangaswami Com. Vol.*, pp. 187-93).
4. V. R. R. Dikshitar : op. cit.
5. N. C. Das : op. cit., p. 6.

They were of black hue, with curly woolly hair and were loaded with chains, collars and girdles of gold and other bright ornaments which their race has always loved and in which the kindred race of Soudans still delights. Dr. John Fraser[1] has shown that the earliest population of Ceylon was a pre-Aryan black race and that the Dravidian tribes of the Deccan descended from them, that portions of that race were, by the Aryan occupation of India, driven onwards into the Eastern peninsula, Indonesia and Oceania, and that the Malayesians are their modern representatives.

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[1] *Polynesian Journal*, vol. v, quoted in *ibid*.

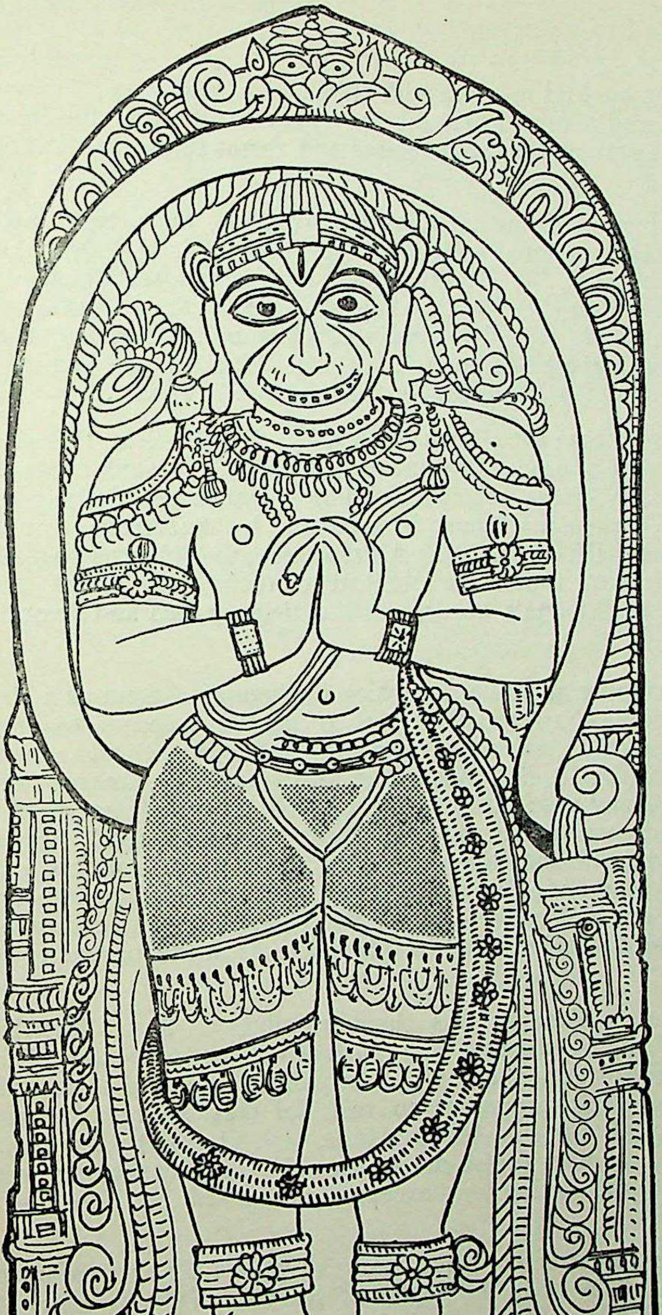

Fig. 12. Hanumān ; Belur, twelfth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

CHAPTER III

THE VĀNARAS

The Vānaras claim a fairly important place in the Rāmāyaṇa. Some scholars are, however, inclined to regard them as a mythical tribe, and Vālmīki's discription of their doings as a "farrago of nonsense." Some others dismiss them as mere animals from the fact of the poet's furnishing them with the attributes of monkeys. But the civilization of the Vānaras as depicted by Vālmīki belies these conjectures and shows that they were as much a human tribe as any other. They had a distinctive social organization and a peculiar culture of their own. Their civilization, although belonging to a lower plane, as compared with that of the Aryans of Madhyadesh and the Rākṣasas of Laṅkā, was grand in its native simplicity and untarnished by imperialistic ambitions. The Rāmāyaṇa is the earliest and perhaps the only source which gives us a wide window on the Vānara culture.

The Vānaras are depicted as creatures of extraordinary strength and "proficient in performing miracles, heroic, swift as wind, skilled in polity, wise, equal to Viṣṇu in prowess, unslayable, resourceful, possessing divine forms and skilful in the use of all weapons like the nectar-consuming gods" (I. 17. 2-4). They are repeatedly referred to as *kāma-rūpiṇaḥ* (VI. 127. 24 ; I. 17. 18 ; IV. 19. 10 ; 39. 38), that is, capable of assuming forms at will. During his first meeting with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān had abandoned his *kapi*-form and assumed the guise of a mendicant ; and during his entry and stay in Laṅkā, he assumed different guises and forms to escape detection (IV. 3. 2).

The Vānaras used their teeth and nails as offensive weapons, their teeth being sharp like those of a tiger, which presented a hideous appearance (IV. 31. 24), making the hair stand on end (*romaharṣaṇāḥ*, IV. 31. 23). They were of colossal dimensions (*mahākāyāḥ*) with golden complexion (IV. 33. 2). Sugrīva, one of their chiefs, was tawny like gold (*hema-piṅgala*, IV. 14. 19). The hordes of Vānaras invading Laṅkā are described as copper-faced, having golden colour (VI. 42. 14). The Rākṣasī guards of Sītā at Laṅkā referred to Hanumān as "the copper-faced *kapi*..." (V. 53. 23).

The bodies of Vānaras were covered all over with hair. Nevertheless, they were not entirely devoid of the element of grace. The palace of Sugrīva, it is said, abounded in noble-looking (*priya-darśana*) Vānaras wearing unfading garlands and clothes. On entering the harem of Sugrīva, Lakṣmaṇa found it occupied by numerous damsels possessed of youth and beauty (IV. 33. 6, 22). All the same, the Vānaras had, like the monkeys of today, "that delicate appendage attached to their body which goes by the name of tail," which, in Rāvaṇa's words, was the highly prized and favourite appendage of *kapis* (V. 53. 3).

The Vānaras had also some mental traits which distinguished them as a class from others.[1] The outstanding characteristic in their nature appears to have been *cāpalyam* or withness of mind as much as of body, and even Rāma accused Vālī of this "drawback" in him (IV. 18. 5). According to Rāvaṇa, the Vānaras were by nature volatile, indisciplined and vascillating (VI. 57. 9). He laughingly enquired of his spy, Śuka, whether he had come under the sway of the "fickle-minded" Vānaras (VI. 24. 26). When Bharata did not find Rāma returning to Ayodhyā from his exile at the scheduled time given by Hanumān, he was led to suspect Hanumān's information as inspired by the fickleness of mind to which the Vānaras were so commonly prone (VI. 127. 23). Hanumān himself testified to this weakness in the character of his tribe (IV. 54. 9).

Another characteristic of the Vānaras was their irascibility. Śuka described them as rough by nature ; so, conducting any parleys with them was out of the question (VI. 24. 29). *Caṇḍa* or fierce is an epithet frequently employed to describe them (VI. 26. 28, 31). It was their proneness to mischief that enraged the sage Mataṅga who warned them all off his Mataṅgavana (IV. 11. 54-9). Particular manifestation of this *prakṛtiḥ kapīām* (apish nature) is elaborated by the poet with much rollicking humour while recounting the excesses committed by Vānaras in Madhuvana in sheer joy (V. 61).

By nature, the Vānaras were extremely emotional, and good luck or misfortune would find them at the heights of joy or in the depths of sorrow. Vālmīki gives an exquisite description of the behaviour of Hanumān transported with joy at the sight of Mandodarī whom he mistook for Sītā (V. 10. 54). Again, the Vānaras physically manifested their unbounded joy on seeing Hanumān return successful from his mission to Laṅkā (V. 57. 24-34), and on finding Rāghava brothers completely restored to health through the favour of Garuḍa (VI. 50. 61-4). But, at the same time, the Vānaras were readily moved to tears when they saw Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in the toils of the snake missiles (*nāgapāśa*, VI. 46. 6). Sugrīva himself is described on the occasion as completely cast down by sorrow (VI. 46. 30). When Lakṣmaṇa narrated to the lord of the Vānaras how Sītā was lost in the forest, such dejection came over

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[1] See Narayana Aiyar : *Vālmīki and Vānaras*.

Sugrīva that the poet could only compare him to his solar parent in the grip of an eclipse !

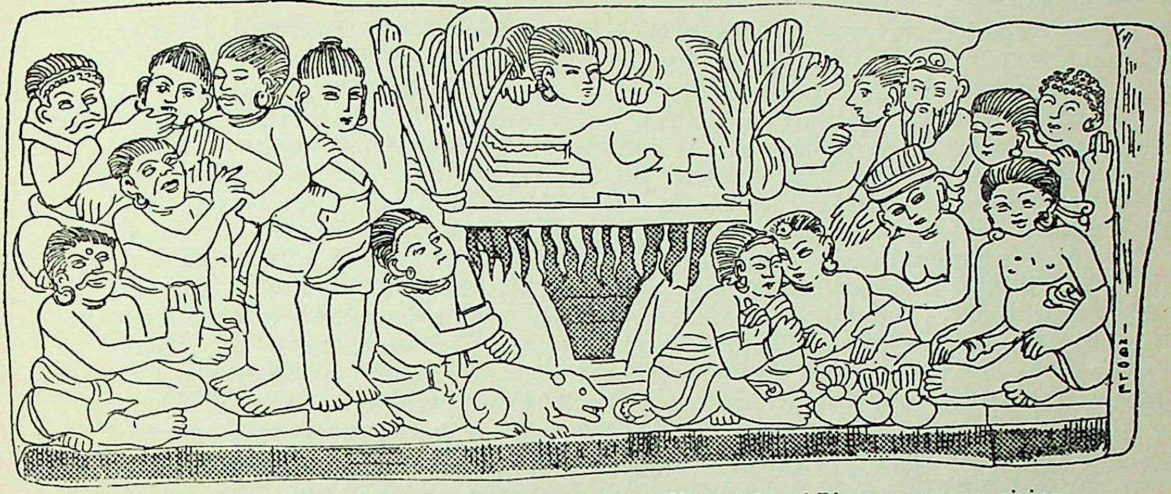

Fig. 13. Preparation for burning Daśaratha's body ; Kausalyā and Bharata are see giving presents to the Brāhmaṇas ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Inquisitiveness was yet another characteristic trait of the Vānaras. At the time the Puṣpaka plane came over the Ikṣvāku capital, the Vānaras rose from their seats again and again to have a view of the city (VI. 123. 53). This inquisitiveness naturally produced in them a love of chatter and tale-bearing. When, during the thick of the battle of Laṅkā, they caught sight of Vibhīṣaṇa, they were struck with panic ; they perhaps mistook him for that bogey-man Indrajit and straightway began to whisper the secret into one another's ears (VI. 46. 41). Being voluble by nature, they could not help chattering in and out of season. That is, perhaps, why Sampāti had to warn them to cease their chatter and listen with undivided attention to what he had to tell them about Sītā (IV. 60. 3). The Uttarakāṇḍa describes how, even while setting out for heaven in the wake of Rāma, the Vānaras could not help making sundry noises (VII. 109. 16).

Vālmīki often depicts the Vānaras as seemingly gullible creatures by giving instances of their unfounded fears, characteristic credulity, absurd cowardice and grotesque conjectures. When Kumbhakarṇa made his first appearance on the battle-field, the Vānaras scuttled in all directions (VII. 15. 54). Vibhīṣaṇa advised Rāma that the only way to stop the rout was to tell the Vānaras that the giant was nothing more than an uplifted engine, a sort of "wooden horse" (VI. 61. 32). Aṅgada, accordingly, shouted to the fleeing Vānaras that what they were running away from was nothing but a scarecrow (VI. 66. 6). He reminded them of their great and noble families and of their boasts in *jana-saṁsads*, popular assemblies, and thus exhorted them to stand their ground and repulse the Rākṣasa onslaught : "Ye unmanned cowards, fleeing thus with weapons cast away, you will be laughed at and derided by your wives, and that will be death unto ye living" (VI. 66. 20). Though with great difficulty he and his colleagues succeeded in rallying them (VI. 66. 8). Indrajit accurately gauged the mind of these simple, credulous allies of Rāma and staged the slaughter of *māyā* Sītā on the battle-field with the object of terrorizing them. This ruse provided him the much-needed time for completing his Nikumbhilā sacrifice which would render him unassailable. Hanumān himself was deceived by Indrajit's ruse and, though he tried to check his comrades from fleeing so precipitately, he soon gave up the effort in despair (VI. 82. 20-2). Also, on an earlier occasion, the otherwise intelligent Hanumān had deceived himself as to Sītā's identity in Rāvaṇa's seraglio (V. 10. 53).

The Vānaras had a strong gregarious instinct, and generally moved about in troupes. When they went in search of Sītā, they always moved about in a body, never taking the risk of being separated from one another. It was, indeed, on account of this gregarious instinct that the Vānara leaders like Aṅgada, Hanumān and Jāmbavān never thought of splitting their company into sections, though that would have enabled them to search the extensive South more speedily.[1] Directly born of this instinct was the habit to follow their leaders blindly. When Hanumān espied the Ṛkṣa-bila cave and declared that there must be water inside, all the Vānaras repeated what he had said and at once entered the cave without further ado (IV. 50. 17). Again, when Aṅgada, dismal and disheartened, squatted on *darbha* grass, resigned to his fate to perish of hunger, his lieutenants, prompted by their mimicking instinct, at once followed suit (IV. 55. 17, 19-20). Even the valour of the Vānaras, of which so much is said in the Rāmāyaṇa, depended entirely on those who led them to the battle. For instance, finding it difficult to withstand the attack of Akampana (the Rākṣasa hero who poured his shafts on the Vānara host) they took to their heals, both captains and rank and file, and only when they saw Hanumān bravely encountering the redoubtable hero did they gather courage and rally round their leader (VI. 56. 9). But, of course, when properly led, the Vānaras could play havoc in the enemy ranks by their peculiar mode of fighting (VI. 14. 3).

The sown of Kiṣkindhā was the stronghold of the Vānaras. From Sāraṇa's estimate of the number of Vānaras there, it is seen that "Vānaras numbering 100 *vṛndas*, 1,000 *śaṅkus* and 21,000 crores were the immediate companions of Sugrīva hailing from Kiṣkindhā" (VI. 28. 4-5). Besides Kiṣkindhā, various other places in the country (such as mountainous regions, forest tracts, river sides and sea-shores abounding in trees and wild fare) served as their habitat (IV. 37. 26).

The Vānaras are described as living in a cavern (IV. 33), which Lakṣmaṇa is representated as entering to convey a message of remonstrance to Sugrīva for his tardiness in aiding Rāma. The cavern, however, is a cave only in name, as in the usual type of Indian poetry it is depicted as filled with trees, flowers, thickets, palaces, a mountain stream, etc. This feature of the Vānara life (their residence in caverns) may be either purely the poet's imagination intended to be in keeping with their other characteristics, or it may have a reference to the crude habits of the aboriginal inhabitants of the southern forests.[2]

From the numerous estimates of Vānara population in those days, as given by Vālmīki at several places in the epic (IV. 35. 21-2 ; 37. 20-6; 39. 12-37; VI. 26. 11-46; 27. 23-7), it can safely be taken that their numerical strength was considerable in the country, which may have probably influenced the exiled Rāma to seek their support in his distress.

The Vānara chiefs whom Sugrīva summoned for assistange of Rāma were aboriginal princes who ruled over almost all the tracts to east and south of the Aryan possessions. They formed a distinct entity and their community was known by the common name of *hari-gaṇa*. *Hari* is another term for Vānara. The *hari-gaṇas* could be divided into three classes—Ṛkṣas, Golāṅgūlas and Vānaras (I. 17. 19-20). Contrary to popular belief, the Ṛkṣas were not bears but a community of *haris* who lived on the Ṛkṣa mountain. With regard to the Golāṅgūlas, Sāraṇa says that they were black-faced, terrible and powerful (IV. 27. 32). The Vānaras, on the other hand, were highly civilized.

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1. Narayana Aiyar : op. cit., p. 2.
2. J. Muir : *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. ii, p. 416.

The Vānara society was divided into different clans known as *yūthas*. The foremost among the Vānaras became chiefs of different clans known as *yūthapas*. A few of such *yūthapas* were Durdhara, Kesarī, Gavākṣa and Nīla. The clan-chiefs (*yūthapas*) were subject to the overall authority of a higher chief known as *yūthapa-yūthapa* (VI. 26. 9). Two of these higher chiefs were Sannādana and Jāmbavān. Above such chiefs was the commander-in-chief known as *mahā-yūthapa-yūthapa* (VI. 27. 11). The highest authority to which the entire Vānara community owed allegiance was the Vānara king who resided in the hill fortress of Kiṣkindhā along with the principal clan-chiefs (VI. 28. 30). All the Vānaras, whether they lived in hills or forests, submitted to the suzerainty of Vālī or Sugrīva, directly or indirectly, through such chiefs as Nala, Nīla or Hanumān (I. 17. 32-3). Every Vānara owed personal allegiance to the king. In times of peace he worked for him in the homeland, while in times of war he was called upon to fight for him in far-off lands, personal element being constantly maintained between the ruler and the ruled. This system is reminiscent of the feudal age of later times, and in this respect the Vānara society resembled ancient German society.

The Vānaras had also some sort of political organization. The many references to *kapi-rājya* (IV. 35. 5 ; 36. 5) point to the existence of a well-knit Vānara principality. The ideas of hereditary kingship, primogeniture, ministry, espionage, etc., were practically current among the Vānaras. On the death of his father, Vālī, being the eldest son, was installed on the throne by the ministers of State (IV. 9. 2). Sugrīva's coronation was duly approved by the important officials of the capital, and it took place in prescribed manner with royal dignity (IV. 26). Sugrīva having been without an heir, his eldest brother's son, Aṅgada, was appointed heir-apparent (*yuvarāja*, IV. 26. 38). The fact of the alliance between Sugrīva and Rāma was reported to Aṅgada by spies, and by him to Tārā (IV. 15. 16). Hanumān was well versed in the duties and functions of an envoy (*dūta*, V. 2. 38 ; 30. 38). He made a reference to *kośa* or royal treasury during his sermon to Sugrīva to rouse him from slumber (IV. 29. 11).

All social and political organizations have for their foundation the ideas of ownership and property, and these fully obtained among the Vānaras also. Tārā, in order to placate the enraged Lakṣmaṇa, declared that for Rāma's good Sugrīva could renounce Rumā, herself, wealth, grain and cattle (IV. 35. 13). When the search-party of the Vānaras deputed for the South was seemingly foiled in its efforts by the vast stretch of the ocean. Aṅgada feelingly exclaimed : "Through whose favour shall we again behold, after the accomplishment of our objective, our wives and children and our hearth and home ?" (IV. 64. 17).

The Vānara kingdom enjoyed internal independence (*svarājya*), though it was a feudatory of the imperial Ikṣvākus. Rāma claimed the whole of Vālī's territory as belonging to the Ayodhyā empire, and justified this by the fact of having killed him (IV. 18. 6).

As admitted by Vālī, the Vānaras, being an avowedly forest-bred race, subsisted on raw products of nature such as fruits and roots (IV. 17. 30). Tārā's reference to grains in the course of her expostulation with Lakṣmaṇa might indicate that some kind of grain too was an article of diet for the Vānaras (IV. 35. 13). Though the use of fire was known, it appears cooking had not made any progress in the Vānara society. In this respect, they lagged behind the Aryans and the Rākṣasas. However, in their proneness to intemperance, the Vānaras vied with the Northerners and Southerners, and the epic depicts both Vānara men and women kissing the cup.

Contrary to general belief, the Vānaras did not go about nude. They used to don elegant dress and ornaments. They usually put on two garments, as can be inferred from Sugrīva complaining to Rāma that he was banished by his brother Vālī without allowing him a second cloth on his body (IV. 10. 26). The Vānaras are often depicted as girding up their loins before action. On the occasion of his first encounter with Vālī, Sugrīva, tightening his loin-cloth, bellowed challenge to Vālī, tearing open the sky (IV. 12. 15). On the completion of the obsequies for Vālī, high Vānara officials squatted about the grief-stricken Sugrīva who was then wearing wet clothes (*klinna-vāsasam*, IV. 26. 1). When Sītā saw Hanumān for the first time in Laṅkā, she found him with a white cloth on (V. 32. 1).

Ornaments were used in profusion by the Vānaras. The damsels in Sugrīva's palace were well attired and richly ornamented (IV. 33. 23). Vālī is described by Vālmīki as *hema-mālī* (IV. 11. 61) or wearing a necklace of gold. When Sugrīva bows at Rāma's feet with great reverence, his ornaments are described as hanging down from his neck (*pralambīkṛta-bhūṣaṇaḥ*, IV. 12. 6).

The Vānaras possessed an aesthetic sense. They loved to use scents and flowers, cosmetics and unguents. The atmosphere of the streets in Kiṣkindhā is described as surcharged with the sweet aroma of *aguru* and lotus flowers (IV. 33. 7). Lakṣmaṇa found Sugrīva in the midst of heavenly atmosphere, his limbs profusely decorated with ornaments and ointment, and surrounded by girls in divine ornaments and unfading garlands (IV. 34. 63-4).

The manners and customs current in the Vānara society did not differ materially from those of the Aryans. Whatever their early life and manners, these Vānaras at the time of Rāma had adopted Aryan culture and Aryan institutions.

The art of hospitality and proper etiquette was meticulously practised by the Vānaras. Hanumān appears to have been an adept at introducing oneself to strangers and winning their confidence. When he first approached Rāma, Hanumān was in the guise of a *bhikṣu* or mendicant, and he gained his confidence by his humble salutations and profuse panegyrics (IV. 3. 2-4). Again, while in an alien land, he could inspire confidence in the suspicious and cautious Sītā through his winning manners and well-devised conversation (IV. 33). That towards one another also the Vānaras behaved in a civil and polite manner is evident from the affectionate reception accorded to Hanumān by his compatriots on his return from Laṅkā (V. 57. 32-6). Sugrīva is described as humbly approaching his father-in-law, Suṣeṇa, bowing low at his feet and, with folded hands, requesting him to go to the West at the head of a large search-party (IV. 42. 1-6). Instances could be multiplied to show that the Vānaras knew the proper mode of conduct in the presence of superiors. They knew how to behave cordially towards their Aryan allies. Sugrīva. on seeing Lakṣmaṇa in his palace, was up on his legs leaving his golden seat and, followed by his wives, proceeded to welcome him (IV. 34. 3-4). Again, when Sugrīva went to see Rāma for the first time after his coronation, it is said that, on arriving at the spot, he left his conveyance and, appearing before Rāma, folded his hands, his action imitated by all the Vānaras present there (IV. 38. 15-9).

The custom of offering and receiving presents was well in vogue among the tribe. The messengers despatched by Sugrīva to convey the general mobilization order are described as gathering heavenly fruits, roots and herbs from the sacrificial grounds of Śiva on the Himālayas to win the favour of their king (IV. 37. 31-2). On the eve of Sugrīva's coronation, Hanumān is said to have pressed Rāma on his master's behalf to pay a visit to Kiṣkindhā so that the grateful lord of the Vānaras might get an opportunity to return thanks by making presents of gems and garlands (IV. 26. 4-8).

Sugrīva's coronation (IV..26), which took place according to scriptural injunctions and the established usages of the country, demonstrates that the Vānaras observed Aryan laws and regulations. Vālī's cremation (IV. 25) also makes it abundantly clear that the Vānaras had become completely Aryanized and that their outlook and spirit *was* Aryan. When and how this primitive community came under the

Aryan influence, it is difficult to determine, but there is no doubt about this that this had happened long before Rāma arrived on the scene.

Kiṣkindhā, the capital of the Vānara principality, presented a scene of great affluence and ease. The description of the city, when Lakṣmaṇa passed through it on his way to Sugrīva's palace, throws sufficient light on the economic prosperity of the metropolis : "The beautifully white mansions belonging to the various Vānara chiefs situated on the principal thoroughfare were several storeys high and were resplendent like the clouds, adorned with sweet-smelling garlands, abounding in wealth and grains and embellished with superb women The royal palace of Sugrīva was surrounded by a white wall built of crystal stones ; it was charming like Indra's own palace, white-capped like the summit of the Kailāsa Hill, thickly planted with desire-yielding, flowering, fruit-yielding shady trees, closely guarded by strong Vānaras carrying weapons, adorned with unfading garlands and having a porch made of molten gold. Lakṣmaṇa had to cross the seven apartments of the palace before he found himself in the *antaḥpura* or inner apartment. It was handsomely furnished with bed-steads and comfortable seats made of gold and silver. There he heard the strains of melodious music, both vocal and instrumental, rich in keeping time, wording and 'ornamentation.' The attendants' of Sugrīva appeared contented, ever ready to carry out orders" (IV. 33. 12-24).

Vālmīki testifies to the existence of a certain amount of promiscuity in the sexual relations of the Vānaras. The circumstances relating to Hanumān's birth smack of this. It is said that once Añjanā, the wife of the Vānara chief Kesarī, was walking leisurely in human form on a hill-top. The wind-god, Vāyu, gradually removed her fine wearing apparel—a circumstance which exposed the exquisiteness of the comely woman (fig. 14) At sight of her ravishing beauty, Vāyu could not restrain himself and the passion-ridden gallant at once violated her. Her feeble protests were pacified when she was promised a son as valiant, intelligent and swift as the wind-god himself. In due course, Añjanā gave birth to Hanumān in a lonely cave (IV. 66. 8-20).

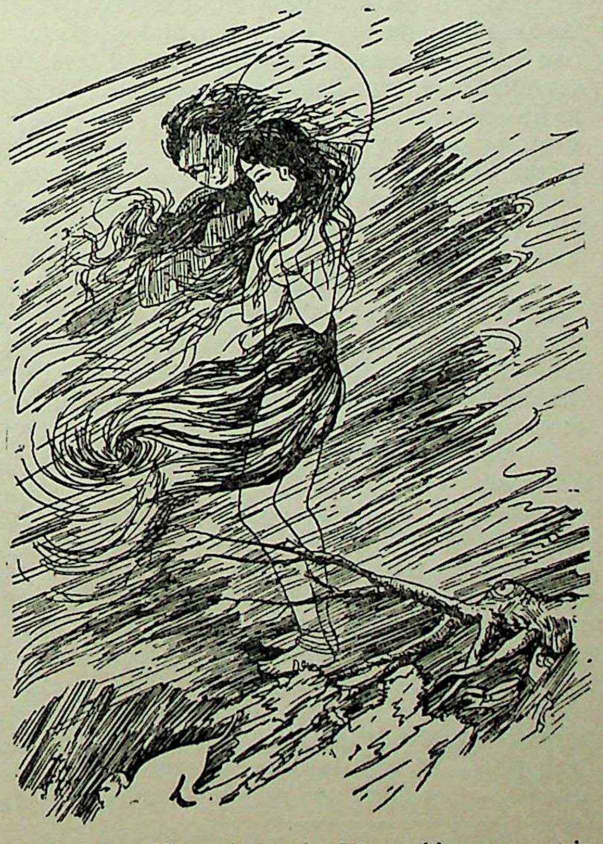

Fig. 14. The wind-god, Vāyu, blows to strip Añjanā of her garments and expose her lovely figure ; Somalal Shah.

Although Jāmbavān described Hanumān as the natural (*aurasa*) son of the wind-god and the "deputed" (*kṣetraja*) son of Kesarī (IV. 66. 29-30) ; and although Hanumān himself prided in the fact (V. 35. 81), this instance can in no way be connected with the practice of begetting children "by deputation" which was otherwise a recognized institution in the Mahābhārata age. Here, there was no one in this case who "deputed" Vāyu to produce a son for Kesarī.[1]

The marital lives of Vālī and Sugrīva exemplify sexual laxity among the Vānaras degenerating into incest. Rāma thus admonishes the fallen Vālī : "Transgressing the laws of eternal morality, you are guilty of an incestuous sin with your brother's wife—a reason which has led me to kill you. Impelled by passion, you have violated the chastity of the high-souled Sugrīva's wife. Death is the only penalty recommended for sinners who violate the chastity of their natural sisters or their sisters-in-law" (IV. 18. 18-23). But, it is surprising that Rāma connived at a similar crime committed by Sugrīva himself : when Vālī, who was engaged in a contest with Dundubhi in the depths of a cave, and did not come out, Sugrīva, who waited patiently for full one year at its entrance, returned to Kiṣkindhā and appropriated the extensive Vānara dominion along with Tārā, the wife of Vālī (IV. 46. 8-9). But, when Vālī returned victorious from the contest, he retaliated by exiling Sugrīva penniless and appropriating his wife Rumā (IV. 10. 28). Finally, on the death of Vālī, Sugrīva reclaimed his own wife Rumā as well as Tārā, the wife of Vālī himself (IV. 29. 4 ; 35. 5). That here the wife of the dead foe falls as a natural booty to the conqueror is probably a reflection of primitive conditions prevailing in the community.

It is noteworthy that, on recovering his wife Rumā, Sugrīva did not make her go through the fire-ordeal ; he was not at all scrupulous about a wife who had gone away from him and lived with his brother in concubinage. He takes her back and, when Lakṣmaṇa goes laden with a terrible message from Rāma, the latter finds Sugrīva closeted with Rumā.

In spite of this promiscuity in sexual matters, the institution of marriage, in so far as it brought together a man and a woman as husband and wife and made the two attached to each other by bonds of love, fully obtained in the Vānara community. On their way from Laṅkā to Ayodhyā in the Puṣpaka plane, Sītā expressed her desire to be accompanied by Tārā and the other beloved wives of Sugrīva, as also the wives of other eminent Vānaras (VI. 123. 24-5). Sītā would not have spoken of the wives of the Vānaras had there been no marital bond existing among them. Tārā refers to the married (*saha-bhāryāḥ*) as well as unmarried (*a-bhāryāḥ*) Vānaras of Kiṣkindhā (IV. 19. 16). Her lamentations at the death of Vālī clearly postulates the notion of husband-and-wife relationship (IV. 23. 12-3).

The bond of family life and the memory of one's wife and children propped up the life of the Vānaras wandering in distant regions away from their hearth and home, and kith and kin. Hanumān warned Aṅgada during the search for Sītā that the fickle-minded Vānaras, having been long separated from their wives and children, may even make light of his commands (IV. 54. 9). Vālmīki understandably stresses their keen perturbation consequent upon their long separation from their kith and kin (IV. 54. 17).

Lofty moral ideas are also sometimes given vent to through the lips of the Vānaras. Thus, Aṅgada reproached his uncle, Sugrīva, for his ignorance of *dharma* on account of his carnal enjoyment of his (Aṅgada's) mother, Tārā, during the life-time of Vālī (IV. 55. 3-4)—a standpoint which in its nobility of conception is more akin to the Aryan attitude. Again, when Vāyu lovingly embraced Añjanā with his long arms and when "the soul had met the soul" (*gatātmā*), the she-Vānara remonstrated against this by saying : "Who is it that dares to lay violent hands on my chastity ?" (IV. 66. 16). A rare moral utterance unique in its grandeur is made by Hanumān when spying about Rāvaṇa's harem in search of Sītā. There he comes across a whole galaxy of beautiful women sleeping with dishevelled dress under intoxication produced by liquor. At this sight, Hanumān's inner voice remonstrated that he was transgressing the moral code in feasting his eyes upon the sleeping inmates of an unknown person's harem, for "never have I deigned to cast my eyes on women belonging to others" (V. 11. 37-9). He, however, took consolation in the fact that "I did see minutely the wives of Rāvaṇa at a time when they did not expect me, but all the same my mind was unpolluted. The senses project themselves and fasten upon particular objects only if the mind (*manas*) directs them to do so. That *manas*, which directs the senses, in right ways and wrong ways, is under my full control" (V. 11. 41-2). How Vālī criticizes Rāma—stands good as a masterpiece of moral argument even today (IV. 17) !

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[1] It is, however, unwise to accept such stories in there literal sence. To quote from the Mahābhārata, to Kuntī, the wife of Paṇḍu, were born Yuddhiṣṭhira, Arjuna and Bhīma by invocations to Yama, Indra and Vāyu respectively (by means of a *mantra*). Should we accept this in a worldly gense, Kuntī was a lewd woman and the gods ever ready to pander to the lust of earthly humans.

The Rāmāyaṇa also gives some idea of the religion followed by the Vānaras. They worshipped the gods of the Aryans and followed their religious practices. They performed water-offering (*śrāddha*) rites, and sought the assistance of Brāhmaṇas in conducting their religious ceremonies. Eminent Brāhmaṇas were propitiated by Sugrīva on the occasion of his coronation, who conducted the religious rites connected with the ceremony (IV. 25. 29-30). Propitiatory rites (*svastyayana*) were undertaken by the Vānaras with a view to securing prosperity. Before Vālī set out for his final encounter with Sugrīva, Tārā is said to have bade him adieu after formally walking round him and performing for his success the *svastyayana* rite in prescribed form (IV. 16. 11-2). Similarly, before Hanumān flew across the ocean, the Vānaras performed auspicious rites for the success of his mission (IV. 67. 32-3). Hanumān himself, before embarking on his mission to Laṅkā, is said to have offered obeisance to Sūrya, Mahendra, Pavana, the self-born Brahmā and the manes (V. 1. 8). At Laṅkā, before entering the Aśoka grove, he again prayed to the self-born one, to Agni, Vāyu, Indra the bearer of the thunderbolt, Varuṇa the holder of the noose, the Moon, the Sun, Aśvins, Marut, the sages and all the Spirits for the success of his mission (V. 13. 62-5).

It appears, the Vānaras were a cultured and well-educated race. Hanumān, the counsellor of Sugrīva, is the most prominent Vānara in the epic who impresses Rāma very much by his learning and culture. He was *vākya-jña* and *vākya-kuśala* (IV. 3. 24), *i.e.*, versed in the science of words as well as the art of properly using them (grammar, idiom and rhetorics). From his speech, Rāma concluded that Hanumān "must have been trained in and moulded by (*vinīta*) studies in the *Ṛgveda*, attained, nay, imbibed (*dhārin*) the *Yajurveda* and acquired skill (*vid*) in the *Sāmaveda* to be able to speak in the way he did" (IV. 3. 28). Rāma could also see that the Vānara hero must besides have learnt (*śrutam*) in the many ways, according to many different schools (*bahu-dhā*), the whole science of *vyākaraṇa* (grammar, philology, etymology and phonetics) ; for, though he spoke at length, he never used a wrong or unsuitable word, he had no mannerisms of expression or gestures, and his speech was quite in accordance with the standard excellence of a rhetorical delivery (IV. 3. 29-33).

Hanumān was in fact an ideal *saciva* (minister) and an ideal *dūta* (envoy) winning his ends by sweet speech. For this reason, Lakṣmaṇa from the outset addressed him as *vidvan* (learned sir, IV. 3. 35-7). Sugrīva found in him strength, heroism, intelligence, sagacity and knowledge of the science of polity ; he was a *paṇḍita* or master scholar in *naya* (statecraft), gifted with intellect and learning, perseverance and objectivity (IV. 44. 7).

And, then, when Vibhīṣaṇa was seeking Rāma's refuge, Hanumān showed his superiority over the other Vānara chiefs as a refined, well-bred and well-educated person (*saṁskāra-sampannaḥ*)—polished, light (fluent) and sweet yet weighty in

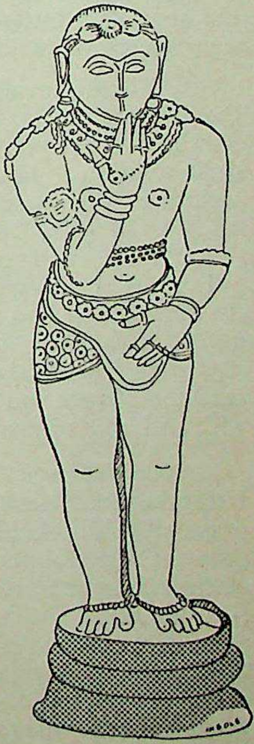

Fig. 15. Hanumān ; Tanjor, Cola, tenth century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

speech—not anxious to show his debating skill (*vāda*), not keen in contests (*saṁgharṣa*), not vain of his talents, and with no itching for making a speech (VI. 17. 52).

Hanumān, though not an expert like Suṣeṇa and Jāmbavān, knew something about drugs and medicinal herbs. His educated mind was always alert in marking the cultural features of the lands he visited. In the course of his quest for Sītā, Hanumān explored the romantic hill-fort of Ṛkṣabila and its history, and befriended its cultured nun-warden, Svayaṁprabhā (IV. 50-3). Even in his capacity as a secret emissary to the captive Sītā in Laṅka, he does not fail to notice the orderly arrangements, artistic achievements and feminine charms in the great Rākṣasa metropolis (V. 4, 12, 18). His scholarly training also comes out in his appreciation and use of similes based on academic experience in conversation with Sītā who too was well educated, and also in his careful description of the special features of Rāma's intellectual, moral and physical education before Sītā for her assurance ; for, "one cannot analyse and describe (or understand and recognize) an education without being himself educated and familiar with the type analysed and described."[1]

In short, Hanumān was a complete man, a harmonious (*śobhana*) personification, as it were, of bodily strength, heroism, vigour and courage, nobility of spirit (*sattvam*), forbearance and humility, learning and skill (VI. 113. 25-6). And he was an ideal orator who alone was capable of a speech throughout indicative of "complete eightfold understanding" : in whose mind every item of knowledge arose out of an awakening of interest (*śuśrūṣā*), that led to attentive listening, to sensing (*śravaṇa*) and to grasp thereof (*grahaṇa*), subjected to criticism and questioning and strengthened by removal of doubts (*ūhā* and *apoha*)—thus leading to apprehension of the obvious utilities of the matter known (*artha-jñānam*) and its ultimate (underlying) significance or reality (*tattva-jñānam*) (VI. 113. 24).

Vālmīki, incidentally, alludes to the education of several other Vānaras.[2] Of the Vānara chiefs, whose opinion was elicited by Rāma on Vibhīṣaṇa's offer for help, Śarabha was acquainted with *artha-niścaya*, problems of the science of polity and their solution ; Jāmbavān was noted for his *śāstra-buddhi*, understanding of the scriptures, discernment and flawless speech ; and Mainda for arguments (IV. 17. 43, 45, 47). Sugrīva in his speech referred to the didactic fable of the owl and crows (VI. 17. 19), and opined that no lodgment be given to the traitorous Rākṣasa (VI. 18. 4-7)—a view which Rāma regarded as unfit even for one who had not read the *śāstras* and had not listened to the instruction of elders (VI. 18. 8). Rāma then quoted a *gāthā* (folk-song) of sage Kaṇḍu and recommeded to Sugrīva his precepts regarding friendliness to seekers thereof (VI. 18. 26-7). It follows that Sugrīva did read the *śāstras* and did listen to the instruction of elders, and was also acquainted with and able to profit by the *gāthā*-literature produced by sages like Kaṇḍu.

The Vānaras appear to have been found of touring distant regions. The Uttarakāṇḍa states that "Vālī used to visit the four seas daily for offering his *sandhyā*-prayers" (VII. 34. 33) ; and that Hanumān had traversed the whole earth to drink deep at the fountains of learning. Jāmbavān is said to have "tramped round the world twentyone times on the occasion of *samudra-manthana* (churning of the ocean)" (IV. 66. 32). The Vānaras' acquaintance with various lands and regions endowed them with the knowledge of medicinal herbs and their habitat. Indeed, they were the foremost physicians of the age. During the battle of Laṅkā, on more than one occasion, lives of the principal Vānara chiefs and of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were saved by the medical treatment of the physician Suṣeṇa (VI. 50. 30-1 ; 91. 20-7 ; 101. 29-32).

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1. S. C. Sarkar : *Educational Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p. 83.
2. Op. cit., pp. 83-4.

Among Vānara women, Tārā, daughter of Suṣeṇa and consort in turn of Vālī and Sugrīva, is depicted by Vālmīki as a versatile lady of great genius. When Sugrīva came for the second time to challenge Vālī, Tārā feeling ominous danger for her husband, entreated him to make compromise with his brother and his ally Rāma (IV. 15. 7-30). Though subsequently Vālī paid heavily for ignoring her advice, he did not forget to thank her for her wise counsel and affection (IV. 16. 9). He acknowledged Tārā's lofty intellect and culture when he thus advised Sugrīva before breathing his last: "This Tārā is well accustomed to spring into the sources of action, is well-versed in the science of dealing with omens, and is skilful in doing everything. Whatever action she approves of, let that be done without hesitation, for she seldom miscalculates" (IV. 22. 13-4).

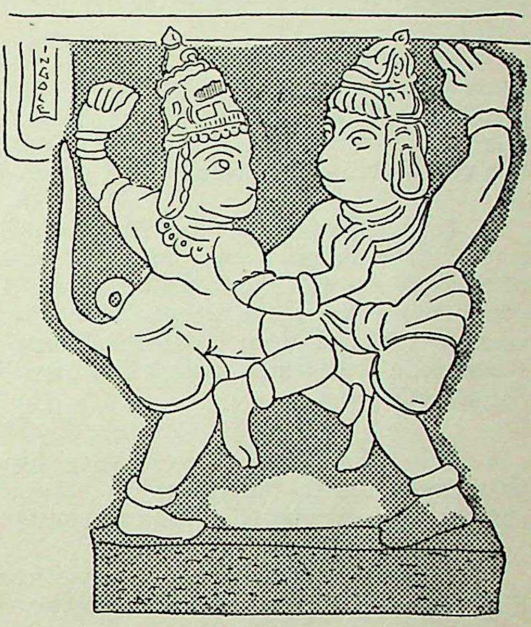

Fig. 16. Vālī and Sugrīva fighting; Hazara Rāma temple, *circa* sixteenth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Tārā seems to have had a sturdy training similar to that of Spartan women. She was a handsome woman possessing a faultless complexion, charming eyes, a sweet tongue and a captivating smile (IV. 20. 26 ; 24. 26 ; 16. 11 ; 19. 17). Her qualities evoked universal admiration (*loka-śrutā*, IV. 23. 1). She was well-read in scriptures as is proved by her numerous quotations (IV. 33. 51-7) from the Purāṇas in order to pacify the enraged Lakṣmaṇa. She tried to shield Sugrīva's delinquency by proving, on the basis of the traditional knowledge of the day, that every human being—much more a Vānara, fickle by nature—is liable to err when dominated by the all-powerful Cupid (IV. 33. 54-7). By her womanly tact, charming persuasiveness and words of high import (*vacanam mahārtham*, IV.33.58), she averted an unseemly brawl between Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva and succeeded in reconciling and winning the confidence of the former (IV. 33. 38-62). She was obviously a remarkable woman "combining feminine arts and accomplishments with high abilities in statecraft and oratory, and tender emotion with high spirits—voluptuous in easy times yet firm and wise in action when necessary ; it was practically Tārā who ruled Kiṣkindhā, through Vālī and Sugrīva both—their policies and acts were dictated by her."[1] It was she who arranged for the quest of Sītā while Sugrīva was immersed in pleasures (IV. 35. 19-22). Sītā must have recognized Tārā's superior personality when she invited her to join the triumphal march to Ayodhyā (VI. 123. 24-5).

As regards weapons and mode of warfare, as earlier indicated, nails and teeth constituted the natural implements of the Vānara heroes (*nakha-daṁṣṭrā-'yudhāḥ*, I. 17. 26). They were past masters in biting and tearing their foes to pieces with tooth and nail, as Kumbhakarṇa learnt to his cost during the battle of Laṅkā (VI. 67. 86-7). Nails and teeth were, however, of little avail till the Vānaras came to close grips with the enemy. Hence they used to employ rocks and trees against the Rākṣasas, who were skilled in the use of missiles. On reaching Laṅkā, the Vānaras are described as standing ready to give battle, holding up trees and stones (VI. 58. 9). Hanumān boasted that he could outwit even a thousand Rāvaṇas in battle by hurling at them rocks and trees by thousands (V. 42. 35).

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[1] S. C. Sarkar: op. cit., p. 85.

Wrestling and boxing was another mode of warfare adopted by the Vānaras to combat their enemies. Vālī fought a wrestling duel with Dundubhi, belaboured him mercilessly with fists, keens, feet, stones and trees, and killed him at last by dashing him on the ground (IV. 11. 42-6). Vālmīki gives a detailed description of the wrestling contest between Rāvaṇa and Sugrīva (VI. 40).

It was habitual with the Vānaras to snatch the weapons of their foes and to employ them against them. Many Rākṣasa heroes met their death at the hands of the Vānaras with their own weapons. Though themselves wielding no missiles, the Vānaras knew the properties of the different *astras*, when to oppose them and when to submit to them. Hanumān knew that it was in vain to struggle against the Brahmāstra with which Indrajit had bayed him, and hence quietly submitted to it (V. 48. 41).

The Vānaras also knew how to dispose their troops on the battle-field for an encounter with the enemy, as proved by the disposition of Vānara forces on the seashore of Laṅkā by Nīla, Mainda and Dvivida (VI. 5. 1-2).

In the light of the above survey of the Vānara culture, it would be pertinent to discuss the question whether the Vānaras were monkeys or human beings.[1] There is a real difficulty in the identification of the Vānaras which arises out of the fact that the poet of the Rāmāyaṇa has not maintained consistency in the depiction of the race. At times he represents them as real monkeys and tries to keep the verisimilitude by various devices. But, the very first time Sugrīva is mentioned, he is described as "a Vānara prince, most excellent of all Vānaras, most mighty, spirited, unconquerable, bright, true to his word, meek, patient, intelligent, great, able, quick-witted, shining and possessed of unsurpassed strength and prowess" (III. 72. 13-4). Surely, this does not sound very monkey-like.

On the other hand, "monkey character" is brought into relief when Sugrīva is painted as stricken with terror at the sight of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. In depicting the scene, the poet uses, besides the word *vānara*, a number of synonyms such as *plavaṅgama*, *hari*, *śākhāmṛga* and *kapi*. Hanumān, while trying to hearten him up, emphasizes his monkeyhood, saying : "O thou monkey (*plavaṅgama*), how menifest is thy monkeyhood, inasmuch as thou, on account of the inconsistency of thy mind, canst not steady thyself in any one thought" (IV. 2. 17). Thereafter, being reassured by the offer of friendship from Rāma—both being homeless wanderers—Sugrīva meets him in a form most handsome to look at and Rāma holds his right hand in his own right hand. Hanumān lights the sacred fire ; Rāma and Sugrīva go round it and so is consecrated the offensive and defensive alliance of friendship between the two in proper Aryan fashion. Real monkeys, however, are ignorant of the use of fire and can have no idea of its ceremonial significance. As against this approach to humanism, immediately after. Sugrīva breaks off a many-coloured and many-flowered branch of a tree, spreads it out and seats himself thereon with Rāma ; and Hanumān with a similar kindliness offers Lakṣmaṇa the branch of a sandal tree in blossom (IV. 5).

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1. See Rajanikanta Guha : *The Three Types of Civilization in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Modern Review*, LXV, pp. 69-79).

This vacillating between the two views of the Vānaras as monkeys and as human beings lands the poet at times in flat contradiction. It becomes glaring in the dialogue between Vālī and Rāma. The dying Vālī charges Rāma roundly with treachery and violation of the well-known rule of warfare and, while pointing out the needlessness of this unrighteous act, says that as he is a five-clawed monkey, his flesh and skin and hair are untouchable to Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas; Rāma's hunting him to death is, therefore, a purposeless deed of savagery. The main ground of Rāma's defence is that he, as the overlord of Kiṣkindhā, is in duty bound to chastise Vālī for his flagrant sin of incest. What an application of the social laws of the Aryans to the community of monkeys!

This contradiction is self-evident in several other respects too. The inauguration of Sugrīva as the king of Kiṣkindhā and the obsequies of Vālī follow Vedic rites. The masterly delineation of Sugrīva, Hanumān, Aṅgada and others bespeaks high culture. The host of data pertaining to their wealth and prosperity, dress and ornaments, education, religion, and social and political organization would make the conclusion inevitable that the poet of the Rāmāyaṇa does not really believe the associates of Rāma to be monkeys.

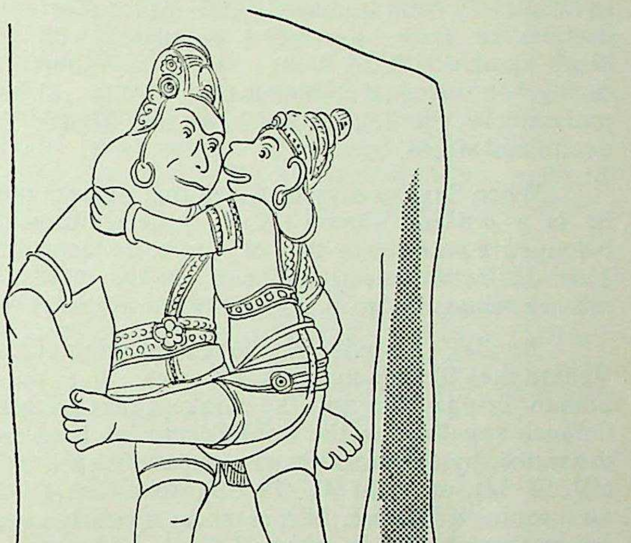

Fig. 17. Above: Vālī and Sugrīva in combat. Below: Tārā bemoaning the death of her spouse Vālī, while Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa look on; Ellora, eighth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The unavoidable impression of the Vānaras being apes which the designation *Vānaras* brings in its train can be removed by postulating the existence of two classes of Vānaras—human Vānaras and monkey-Vānaras. The human Vānaras inhabited the town of Kiṣkindhā and other places, while the monkey-Vānaras belonged to the animal world and these do not play any part in the poet's narrative. While recommending to Rāma the mountain of Citrakūṭa as an ideal place for his forest sojourn, sage Bharadvāja speaks of it as inhabited by Golāṅgūlas, Vānaras and Ṛkṣas (II. 54. 29). These Vānaras could undoubtedly be included among the monkey-

Vānaras, firstly because unlike the human Vānaras of Kiṣkindhā these do not care to welcome or establish friendly relations with the Aryan new-comers, and secondly because Rāma can unhesitatingly put up among them without violating his vow to keep away from human habitations for fourteen years. On the other hand, Rāma declines to enter Kiṣkindhā populated with men-Vānaras, because that would break his vow (IV. 26. 9-10). When the Vānaras on the battle-field of Laṅkā are fleeing, on seeing Kumbhakarṇa, Aṅgada chides them for being afraid like real mokeys (IV. 66. 21), which shows that Rāma's Vānara allies are not the monkeys of the animal world.

When Sugrīva says to Rāma that he does not lament for his wife even though he is a *prākṛta* Vānara (IV. 7. 7), he indicates that the class of men to which he belongs are *prākṛtas* or men of nature, as contrasted with the men of civilization. This distinction clearly appears in the words of Rāvaṇa who styles the Rāghava princes *manuṣyāḥ* (men) and the Vānaras *prākṛtāḥ* (natives) (VI. 15. 7).

Besides, a study of the real meaning of the various words used to denote the Vānara men further confirms the view that the members of Rāma's army were human beings and not the monkeys that are generally seen in the forests of India.[1] Of such appallations, the word *Vānara* has been used 1,080 times. Its significance is intimated by the explanatory compounds such as *vana-gocara* (VI. 4. 64), *vanakovida* (IV. 50. 14), *vana-cārī* (IV. 19. 30), *vanaukasa* (IV. 26. 11) and *kānanaukas* (V. 57. 20), all meaning a forester. From these it clearly appears that the world *Vānara* signifies a forester and not a monkey.

Hari, which is used 540 times, is also explained by *vana-vāsī* (IV. 39. 12) and other compounds. The word *plavaṅga* is used about 240 times and its use appears to be appropriate wherever it is employed. It signifies the capacity to run (V. 60. 1). Wherever the word is used, it should be understood to signify the quickness of their speed or their natural habit of running. Hanumān was perhaps the foremost of runners ; that is why his services were requisitioned on many an important occasion.

The word *kapi* is used about 420 times and, in ordinary parlance, means a monkey. Since the Rāmāyaṇa describes the Vānaras as having tails, so they were *kapayaḥ* ! It is this appendage of tail that has misled many to regard them as monkeys. That this tail was not a natural one is hinted at V. 53. 3, where Rāvaṇa says that the tail is an important ornament of the kapis, not a limb of the body. Had it been the latter, it would have been impossible for Hanumān not to feel excruciating pain when his tail was set on fire in Laṅkā (V. 53. 29-30). Hence, these forest men (Vānaras) must have worn a long piece of cloth an end of which was left hanging behind—because of which they were called kapis.[2] The tail is not much in evidence in Vālī, Sugrīva, Aṅgada and others, nor in their females ; only in the case of Hanumān it plays an important part in his heroic feat of burning Laṅkā.

We may, therefore, conclude that the Vānaras were not actual monkeys but were only somewhat apish in appearance—in their physical features and peculiar traits. Since they were active, ferocious, of uncouth appearance, lithe by nature, fond of running and jumping, given to pleasure, with forests and mountains for their general habitat, using sticks and stones, nails and teeth, and giving out shrill yells in battle, the Aryans on seeing such strange people might well have regarded them as monkeys and called them kapis or sākhāmṛgas whenever they manifested such apeish traits. The Rākṣasas called the Vānaras kapis or monkeys in their overbearing confidence in themselves, in the same contemptuous way as the Russians once used to call the Japanese "yellow monkeys." It is likely that the idea once set in motion gained currency in course of time. Even in the days of Megasthenes people believed in human beings who covered themselves with their ears and had one leg only ; and it is not strange if people even in those days believed that Rāma was assisted by monkeys.[1]

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[1] See G. Ramdas : *Aboriginal Tribes in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Man in India*, vol. v, pp. 46ff.).

[2] As a matter of fact, the existence of a tailed class of human beings at one period or another of human history can be shown as probable. The poet Mātṛgupta of Bengal was looked upon as an incarnation of Hanumān, and he is said to have had a tail (D. C. Sen : *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 52). In a certain royal family of India, the custom of wearing a tail is current at the time of coronation (*ibid.*). V.D. Savarkar in his reminiscencess of incarceration in the Andamans has referred to the existence of a class of tailed aborigines there. Among the Śavaras of Vizagapatnam there is a class of men who wear tail as ornament (G. Ramdas : *ibid.*). On these analogies it may be conjectured that a certain class of foresters existed in the Rāmāyaṇa age who wore, the tail as an ornament (*bhūṣaṇa*, V.53.3) or as a totem (*cihna*, VI.37.34) of their tribe.

It is now generally agreed that certain races inhabited ancient India which were known and distinguished by the names of animals, *e.g.*, the Nāgas (serpents), the Ṛkṣas (bears) and the Vānaras (monkeys). Subsequently they came to be looked upon in popular belief as being in form and character animals themselves, whose names they bore, or to whom they bore some fancied resemblance in face, or whom they worshipped as deities, or whose emblem they wore as a totem.[2]

M. N. Ray[3] identifies the Vānaras with "the Vrātyas of the first migration who had taken to fresh fields and pastures-new of the Deccan on the advent of the Aryans of the second migration, and they had already been reclaimed before Rāma, in the course of his wanderings, visited their habitat." K. S. Ramaswami Sastri[4] also opines that "the Vānaras must have been an Aryan colony which settled down in South India and were cut off from their brothers who were living in North India. They were in the seat and centre of Aryan culture and were achieving remarkable progress."

Gorresio, Wheeler and others regard the Vānaras as the non-Aryan hill-tribes of southern India. They were a forest tribe (*vane-carāḥ*) who became Aryanized much sooner than the other tribes, as is evident from their education and religious ceremonies. Perhaps, after Daṇḍaka's conquest, this tribal community came under the direct influence of the conquering tribe and adopted their practices and beliefs which must have appealed to them. Their kingdom was a small state made up of many tiny villages and towns, but several of their tribal sections inhabited distant parts of India. Attached to the State of Vānaras was a pleasure garden called Madhuvana. Their government was conducted by means of such institutions as the council, the army, the *saciva*s or ministers, and others. Succession was generally hereditary. Sugrīva's coronation, however, was an exception to the rule. The Vānaras were fairly well civilized, though culturally they lagged behind their Aryan and Rākṣasa contemporaries. Still, they could boast of a Nīla who had the necessary engineering skill to build a causeway from the Indian sub-continent through the Ceylon straits to Laṅkā.

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[1] C. V. Vaidya : *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 90.
[2] Op. cit.
[3] *Sarasvatī Bhavana Studies*, vol. v, p. 73.
[4] *Indian Culture*, vol. v, p. 195.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL SET-UP

The Aryan society of the Rāmāyaṇa age was admittedly caste-ridden ; but the caste system was essentially a form of division of labour—an arrangement for convenience. It had nothing of the rigidity which it acquired in later times and no one thought of it then as a bar to progress. Nevertheless, it was certainly more rigid than in the period that preceded it.

The epic expressly mentions the four *varṇas* or castes (*cāturvarṇyam*, IV. 4. 6)—*viz.*, the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras.[1] These *varṇas* had become differentiated from one another, and their privileges, duties and liabilities had become more or less well defined in those times.

The city of Ayodhyā is described as inhabited by Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas devoted to their respective duties (II. 100. 41). At sacrificial ceremonies, separate dwellings were constructed for the Brāhmaṇas, for the kings (Kṣatriyas) and for the citizens (the bulk of whom were Vaiśyas) (I. 13. 10-11). When Rāma was crossing the Gaṅgā, says the Rāmāyaṇa, he muttered *mantras* (hymns) fit to be recited by Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas (II. 52. 78). Different status and a mode of reception are alluded to for members of different castes. Daśaratha is described as issuing instructions that members of all *varṇas* attending his Aśvamedha sacrifice be honoured in accordance with what was their due (I. 13. 14). Thus, it is seen that clear distinctions had come to be established among the different castes.

As regards the origin of caste, the Rāmāyaṇa accepts the theory enunciated in the Vedic *Puruṣasūkta* that the Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras emerged from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet respectively of the Supreme Puruṣa (III. 14. 30). This can be interpreted to denote allegorically a representation of the social classes based on the principle of division of labour. Thus, the Brāhmaṇas, who sprang from the mouth of the Puruṣa, are meant to figure as teachers and instructors of mankind. The role of the Kṣatriyas, coming from the arms, the symbol of valour and strength, is to carry weapons and provide protection to people. The creation of the Vaiśyas from the thighs, representing the lower portion of the body, signifies that they are to provide sustenance for the society in the form of wealth and food. Similarly, the Śūdras, sprung from the feet, have to be the "footmen" or servants of the other *varṇas*.[2]

The first three *varṇas* are spoken of as *dvijas*, or twice-born, their "second" birth being considered to commence with the *upanayana* (sacred thread) ceremony. In all auspicious rites, the ceremonial functions were entrusted to eminent *dvijas* (II. 15. 4). Study of the Vedas, observance of religious vows, offering of sacrifices and giving of gifts were held to be the common duties enjoined equally on the Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas (I. 6. 12,15).

THE BRAINS

Study and teaching of the Vedas (*svādhyāya*) and the practice of penance have been the principal occupations of the Brāhmaṇas ever since the *varṇa* system came into being. They, however, could not impart Vedic instruction to non-*dvijas* (V. 28. 5). There are frequent references to Brāhmaṇas versed in the Vedas (II. 15. 1).

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[1] I. 13. 20 ; VI. 128. 102 ; VII. 75. 18 ; IV. 4. 6.

[2] P. H. Valavalkar : *Hindu Social Institutions*, pp. 283f.

The privileges of the different *varṇas* related mainly to their principal means of livelihood. It was an exclusive privilege of the Brāhmaṇas to officiate at sacrifices. Some Brāhmaṇas became family priests (*upādhyāyas*), while many were engaged as *ṛtviks* (officiating priests, I. 14. 15) at solemn *śrauta* sacrifices or at domestic ceremonies. Kausalyā is described as availing herself of the services of a Brāhmaṇa and, with his help, offering oblations to the fire in accordance with traditional injunctions (II. 25. 27). Brāhmaṇa priests also waited upon royal persons and blessed them with benedictions. The priest of Kausalyā gave the Brāhmaṇas honey, curds, *akṣatas* (rice-grains) and *ghee*, and made them repeat the benedictory prayers to bless Rāma who was going to the forest (II. 25. 30). Rāma asked Lakṣmaṇa to gratify with gifts the preceptor (*ācārya*) who used to wait upon Kausalyā with blessings (II. 32. 15-6).

From the legendary portion of the Bālakāṇḍa, it appears that the Brāhmaṇas were not permitted to officiate as priests for the unworthy. It also appears the Brāhmaṇas at one time organized themselves into a functional group for protecting their rights, and they did not allow members of other castes to encroach upon their privileges. For instance, when the sons of Vasiṣṭha declined to officiate at the sacrifice of King Triśaṅku, he expressed the desire to approach someone else for the purpose. This was an arrogance for which they, by their imprecation, condemned him to become a Cāṇḍāla (outcaste, I. 58. 8-9). Ultimately, when Viśvamitra, who had not yet attained Brāhmaṇahood, agreed to officiate at the sacrifice as a *yājaka*, condemnation was expressed for such an unworthy sacrifice in which a Kṣatriya acted as a priest for a Cāṇḍāla ; and, it was said, gods and sages would not accept the oblation (I. 59. 13-4). This was practically a boycott by the society of a sacrifice not conducted by the Brāhmaṇas (recognized priests). Although in the genuine portions of the Rāmāyaṇa story there are no instances smacking of caste jealousy, it is beyond doubt that sacrificial functions had become the exclusive rights of the members of one particular caste.

Besides their priestly duties, the Brāhmaṇas sometimes also acted as political counsellors to the sovereign. They advised him in interpreting and administering the law, and helped him in framing and carrying out the legislative policy. They sat in the royal assembly (*sabhā*) and gradually assumed the title of *rāja-purohitas* (royal priests, II. 111. 1) and *amātyas* (counsellors, I. 7. 2). In Daśaratha's Council of Ministers, Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva acted as officiating priests (*ṛtviks*) and the rest were diplomatic counsellors (I. 7. 4).

Another means of livelihood, particularly permitted to the Brāhmaṇas, was the receiving of gifts (*pratigraha*). A Brāhmaṇa, oppressed by hunger and unable to support his family, might seek help from a king, as was done by the indigent Trijaṭa (II. 32. 34-5). Those who devoted all their time to Vedic learning, and did not pursue any means of livelihood, naturally depended on the munificence of the king (II. 32. 19-20).

Instances are not lacking of Brāhmaṇas who were led by force of circumstances to pursue for their livelihood avocations other than the three prescribed ones (*viz.*, teaching, priesthood and *dakṣiṇā* or charity). They could maintain themselves even by following the profession of a Kṣatriya or a Vaiśya. Here, Sudhanvā of the Rāmāyaṇa, described as learned in economics and military science, can be compared to Droṇa of the *Mahābhārata*. Rāma received instructions in military science and art at his hands, and the exiled prince gratefully remembered him while at his forest camp (II. 100. 14). Then, again, we find Trijaṭa, a Brāhmaṇa, earning his livelihood by digging earth with spades and ploughing after the manner of a Vaiśya (II. 32. 29), and evidently no stigma was attached to his action though with the advance of the society, as in the *Mahābhārata* (*Sabhā*. XII. 19), a Brāhmaṇa's taking to agriculture was looked down upon.

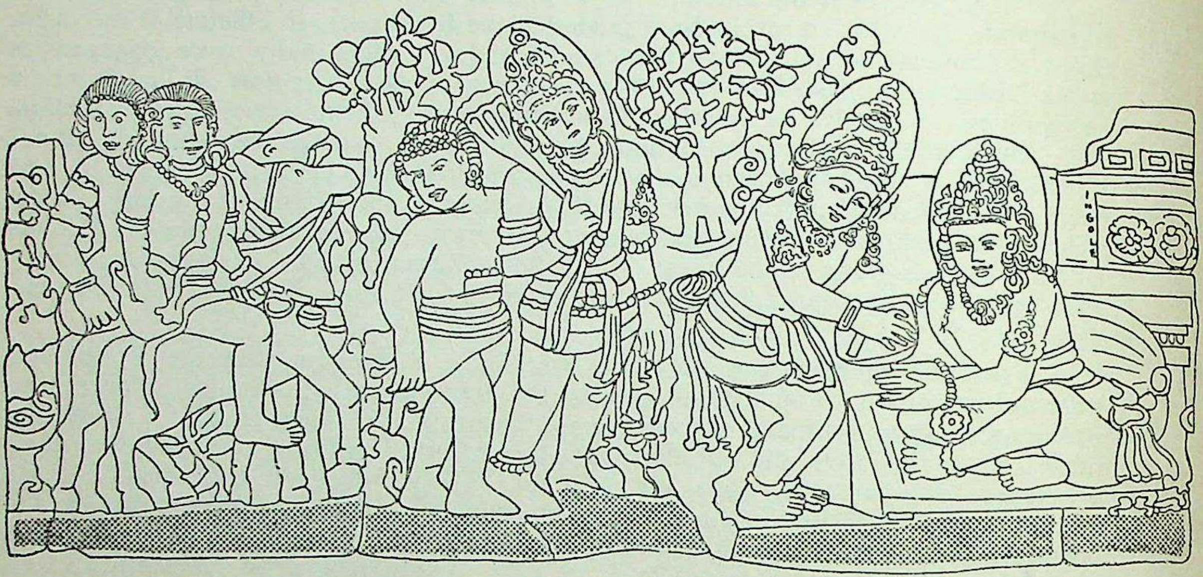

Fig. 18. Bharata, having failed to persuade Rāma to return to the throne from exile, takes Rāma's sandals to be placed on the throne as his symbol and to rule in his name ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The Brāhmaṇas of the Rāmāyaṇa period may be classified under five heads, as follows, from the point of view of occupations followed by them : (a) one who daily performs bath, *sandhyā*, *japa*, *homa*, worship of gods and honouring of guests and *vaiśvadeva*, and is pious and truthful. Many Brāhmaṇas residing in cities evidently were of this type, *e.g.*, in the description of Ayodhyā we are told that it was inhabited by "excellent Brāhmaṇas, learned in the Vedas and their six branches, possessors of the sacrificial fire, endued with all good qualities and intent on seeking truth, great souls and saints, bestowers of thousands of blessings and resembling the mighty sages of old" (I. 5. 23). They worshipped the gods and also guests, and were grateful, generous and powerful (I. 6. 17). Secondly, (b) one who is a *vanavāsī* (forest-dweller), performs austerities, subsists on roots and fruits, and performs daily *śrāddhas*. Hosts of ascetics living in hermitages on the banks of rivers and resorting to the prescribed forest life (*vaikhānasa-mārga*, II. 52. 71), who were visited by Rāma during his exile, were mostly Brāhmaṇas of this type. Next, (c) one who studies the Vedānta, gives up all attachment and is engaged in meditating over Sāṁkhya and Yoga (III. 6. 6 ; I. 12. 4-5). Then, (d) one who resorts to the calling of a Kṣatriya and fights : *e.g.*, Paraśurāma (I. 75. 4) and Agastya (III. 11, 12). And, lastly, (e) one who engages in agriculture and the rearing of cattle : *e.g.*, Trijaṭa (II. 32).[1]

Brāhmaṇas were generally held in high esteem, and anyone who molested them or deprived them of their wealth was severely punished. Bharata, ignorant of the cause of Rāma's exile, enquired of Kaikeyī whether he (Rāma) had robbed any Brāhmaṇa of his wealth (II. 72. 44-5).

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[1] In the age of the Dharmaśāstras, the above-mentioned five classes of Brāhmaṇas came to be known as Deva, Muni, Dvija, Kṣātra and Vaiśya Brāhmaṇas (P.V. Kane : *A History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. ii. part i, p. 130).

In matters of everyday life, Brāhmaṇas were accorded precedence. They were always placed at the head of royal processions. *Dvijas* are described as leading the procession when Rāma proceeded from Nandigrāma to Ayodhyā. He is also described as surrounded by Brāhmaṇas in his Durbar Hall (VI. 128. 38, 36). When Bharata shifted the seat of his government from Ayodhyā to Nandigrāma, he made the journey accompanied by Vasiṣṭha and *dvijas* (II. 115. 10).

Kings are repeatedly enjoined to show respect and devotion to Brāhmaṇas. Rāma was the champion of "Brāhmaṇa culture" in the Rāmāyaṇa age. He asks Bharata at Citrakūṭa whether he accorded due honour to Brāhmaṇas and offered them obeisance (II. 100. 13, 61). Among the attributes entitling Rāma to the heir-apparentship of Kosala, citizens of Ayodhyā mention his devotion to elderly and erudite Brāhmaṇas (II. 2. 33). Hanumān describes Rāma as abiding by the counsel of Brāhmaṇas (V. 35. 13).

The *purohita*, or Chief Priest, was an indispensable entourage to the royalty of the period. Purohitahood was hereditary. For instance, the Vāsiṣṭhas were the hereditary royal priests of the Ikṣvāku family (II. 67. 4). During the reigns of Daśaratha and Rāma, Vasiṣṭha was the foremost *mantrin* (minister) of the State (VII. 37. 15).

The *purohita* was an object of great consideration and respect (*mānārha*) in the family. Rāma took particular care to enquire of Bharata at Citrakūṭa whether "that exceedingly effulgent and learned Brāhmaṇa (Vasiṣṭha), ever steady in morality, has been duly honoured by you" (II. 100. 9). Rāma himself was all courtesy and politeness to Vasiṣṭha. Kings used to rise from their thrones in reverence when approached by their *purohita* (II. 5. 23). In the court of Daśaratha, all the courtiers are described as rising from their seats to show respect to Vasiṣṭha (II. 5. 24).

The *purohita* wielded enormous power in the realm. "To all Ikṣvākus, he is the supreme refuge, and the words of that truthful one cannot be passed over" (I. 58. 3). He occupied a high place of honour in the king's court (VII. 59 C. 33), and helped him in the discharge of his royal duties. He was the right-hand man of the king, his adviser on all occasions. Daśaratha would never do anything without consulting his *purohita* and entrusted the conduct of his Putreṣṭi sacrifice to Vasiṣṭha (I. 13. 4). Again, the king sought Vasiṣṭha's advice on Rāma's marriage with Sītā (I. 68. 14, 17). Vasiṣṭha was the chief figure in the marriage ceremonials. Entire organization and management of Rāma's proposed *yauvarājya* was left to the discretion of Vasiṣṭha (II. 3. 6-7).

The *purohita* played a major role during emergencies. After Rāma's departure to the forest, when Daśaratha died leaving behind him the realm of Kosala without a king, it was Vasiṣṭha who acted as virtual guardian of the kingless dominion. When the *rājakartāraḥ* (Elders) held a session of the Council to appoint a successor to Daśaratha, they looked for guidance to the royal *purohita* and *de facto* chief minister (II. 67. 4). In the absence of the king, the *purohita*, as the foremost minister-cum-religious head, had the right to summon the assembly, occupy its presidential seat and, calling the heir of the deceased monarch to the gathering, offer the throne to him (II. 81. 9-13 ; 82. 7). Thus, Vasiṣṭha is found pacifying the *rājakartāraḥ* by making speedy arrangements for the recall of Bharata from Kekaya, pressing him to accept the sovereignty and, failing in his endeavour, accompanying him to Rāma's forest abode and participating in consultations of high moment.[1]

Priestly influence was palpably stronger in the Rāmāyaṇa than it was later in the *Mahābhārata* period. (It was stronger still in the later age of the Uttarakāṇḍa).

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[1] See Ayodhyākāṇḍa, cantos 68, 79, 82, 104, etc.

King Daśaratha gave consent to his tender sons to embark upon the hazardous enterprise of protecting the ascetics from hostiles only because he apprehended the terrible wrath of Viśvāmitra (I. 21. 4, 22 ; 20. 28). Sītā at Pañcavaṭī condescended to welcome Rāvaṇa (in a *dvija's* guise) with agreeable words for fear of the 'Brāhmaṇa's' curse (III. 47. 2).

In the Uttarakāṇḍa age, the Brāhmaṇas came to be particularly favoured by the law. Special legislation was enacted to safeguard their interests from any possible tyranny of the inferior *varṇas*. A man who seized the wealth of a Brāhmaṇa, or even thought of depriving him of his rightful due, was condemned to the direst of hells. And one who reclaimed a gift already offered to a Brāhmaṇa invariably met with destruction along with his kinsmen. On the other hand, even a guilty Brāhmaṇa was exempt from capital punishment (VII. 59B. 34, 48-51).

It appears that special carriages were designed for Brāhmaṇas (which were known as *brāhma rathas*). For instance, when Vasiṣṭha visited the palace of Rāma to initiate him for his coronation ceremony, he travelled in a chariot (*ratha*) meant only for the use of Brāhmaṇas (II. 5 4). It appears that such *rathas* must have been spectacular with particular marks of distinction that would at once single them out as belonging to the most exalted caste. Rāma could recognize from a distance the chariot of Vasiṣṭha when it entered the palace portals. It seems natural that with the enhancement of their prestige, society must have allowed the Brāhmaṇas special privileges in daily life.

The person of a Brāhmaṇa was regarded as sacred and inviolable, and ranked with kings and cows in sanctity.[1] Wars were frequently embarked upon for their protection.[2] *Brahma-hatyā*, or the slaying of a Brāhmaṇa, was deemed to be one of the greatest sins. In the Uttarakāṇḍa, the sin of killing a Brāhmaṇa could be atoned for only by the performance of an Aśvamedha (VII. 84. 3). Rāma refrained from discharging his arrow at Paraśurāma because he was a respected Brāhmaṇa (I. 76. 6). Daśaratha, when he had inadvertently killed an ascetic youth, was very much perturbed at the thought that he might have killed a Brāhmaṇa and thereby incurred the sin of *brahma-hatyā* (II. 63. 50).

Western scholars have criticized the Rāmāyaṇa as flagrantly Brahmanical in its tenor ; and, of course, there can be no denying the fact that in Rāma's days Brāhmaṇas had the upper hand in the social life of India. But this fact, in itself, does not detract from the worth or merit of the Rāmāyaṇa culture. Pertinently the question arises : What was the secret and source of the tremendous popularity and ascendency held by the Brāhmaṇas ? The secret of their power is manifold ; but it is, above all, in the nature of their appointed *dharma* (of study, teaching and renunciation). Their ascendency was maintained not by physical force, or by some other means, but by the merit of their exemplary conduct. Religion and Vedic study constituted the dominant motive in their life, and Brahmanic culture was undoubtedly one of all-round discipline. In order to attain the high intellectual and moral plane from which he ruled, and which the other *varṇas* appear on the whole to have willingly conceded to him, the Brāhmaṇa had to subject himself to perpetual material poverty and mendicancy.[3] The ideals set before him were of "plain living and high thinking, of forsaking the active pursuit of wealth and of cherishing cultural preservation and advancement."[4] The Brāhmaṇas of Ayodhyā were "pure, always engaged in the performance of their own duties, with senses subdued, giving and

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1. III. 24. 21 ; I. 26. 5 ; IV. 17. 36 ; I. 25. 15.
2. I. 25. 15 ; 26. 5 ; III. 24. 21 ; IV. 17. 36.
3. Nagendranath Ghose : *The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata—A Sociological Study* (*Sir Asutosh Mukerji Silver Jubilee Volumes*, vol. iii, *Orientalia*, part ii, p. 385).
4. P. V. Kane : op. cit.

studying, and receiving with discrimination" (I. 6. 13). The munificent gifts received from the royalty were utilized by them only in augmenting the cultural heritage of the land. The high standard of education and learning prevalent among them (I. 14. 11, 21), and their mastery of the intricacies of Vedic rituals made them indispensable in all sacred and spiritual matters. They possessed not merely the genius for organization, but also the moral power to enforce their will. It is interesting to recall here the legend of the old Brāhmaṇa with his prematurely dead child who could compel King Rāma to take requisite steps to restore him to life; the Brāhmaṇa derived his strength from his moral character, for he never spoke an untruth, nor was he ever jealous and never committed a sinful act (toward any being, VII. 73. 7). The Brāhmaṇas' knowledge of polity and diplomacy, coupled with utter selflessness and disdain for self-aggrandizement, made them the trusted advisers of royalty. Being entrusted with the pre-eminent duty of transmitting ancient intellectual and spiritual culture to the people, and keeping it unsullied, they were naturally granted certain special rights and privileges which were invariably honoured by the other *varṇas*.

THE ARMS

While the Brāhmaṇas looked after the spiritual well-being of the people, the Kṣatriyas were entrusted with the task of protecting the population from external and internal aggression (II. 100. 42, 48). The duties of the Kṣatriyas, as enunciated by Rāma, consisted in "giving alms, taking sacred vows during sacrifices and sparing not even self during battle" (II. 40. 7). A special duty of the Kṣatriyas was to protect the cow and the Brāhmaṇas (I. 26. 4-5). They were to offer protection to anyone who sought it (VI. 18. 27). According to Rāma, "Kṣatriyas carry bows in order that the word *ārta* (distressed) may not exist on earth" (III. 10. 3).

In return for the services rendered by the king to the community as a whole, he was legally entitled to a sixth of the earnings of his subjects (*bali-ṣaḍ-bhaga*, II. 75. 25). A righteous king, true to his duty of protecting his subjects, was further entitled to a fourth part of the spiritual merit earned by the ascetics of the land (III. 6. 14).

The righteous administration of *daṇḍa* or justice was the special obligation of the Kṣatriya king. He was to employ it for the protection of his subjects and never in an irresponsible manner; properly penalizing the guilty was a means of salvation to the king (IV. 17. 29).

On the battle-field, the Kṣatriya soldier had to abide by a strict code of moral laws. It was considered disgraceful and humiliating for soldiers to retreat in defeat. To attack a man without a cause, to kill a man while he was fighting with someone else, to kill many innocent people for the fault of one, to strike a drunken, sleeping, unarmed or tired foe, and to desist from offering protection to one seeking refuge—were acts against the rules of *kṣātra-dharma* or chivalry.[1]

Kingship was the preserve of the Kṣatriya caste and no non-Kṣatriya could usurp that function. The Brāhmaṇas had acknowledged their incapacity to rule. When Daśaratha offered the 'world' to his Brāhmaṇa priests, they replied: "You alone are fit to protect this whole world. The lands are of no use to us, and we are not able to protect them. We are always engaged in Vedic studies. So, you had better give us instead the value of the same in the shape of gems, gold or cows. Give us *that*, for we have no use for land" (I. 14. 47-9).

Brāhmaṇas were the undisputed directors of the *varṇa* organization and the Kṣatriyas, full of veneration for the learned Brāhmaṇas, were required to accept their lead (I. 6. 19). The Brāhmaṇa and Kṣatriya castes, being privileged classes, were joint and (as regards the rest) exclusive possessors of political and social power. If the Brāhmaṇas were the brains, the Kṣatriyas were the arms of the ancient Aryan State. Brāhmaṇas like Vasiṣṭha were colossal thinkers and Kṣatriyas like Rāma were unrivalled administrators and warriors.

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[1] See VI. 82. 4 ; IV. 17. 16. 35 ; III. 65. 6 ; IV. 11. 36 ; VI. 18. 27, etc.

Though the account of the fight between Paraśurāma and Rāma (as related in the Bālakāṇḍa) may seem to indicate estranged relations between Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas, this isolated incident does not disprove the amicable relations ordinarily subsisting between the two sections of its society. Generally, the epic shows that close and cordial relations existed between these higher classes, the king diligently striving to obtain the goodwill of the Brāhmaṇas. At the time of his exile, Rāma tried to persuade Sītā to stay behind and engage herself in the worship of Brāhmaṇas (II. 24. 29), while at Citrakūṭa he enquired of Bharata whether learned Brāhmaṇas along with other citizens continued praying for his welfare (II. 100. 64). Sītā reverently saluted Brāhmaṇas before submitting herself to the fire-ordeal at Laṅkā (VI. 116. 24). An instance of a Kṣatriya's extreme willingness to oblige and gratify Brāhmaṇas is King Alarka's offering of his two eyes to a learned Brāhmaṇa begging them of him (II. 14. 5). The story of King Viśvāmitra's attempt to carry off the cow of sage Vasiṣṭha might, however, indicate that some of the kings were high-handed and treated Brāhmaṇas with no respect whatever (I. 53-6). But the epic describes how King Viśvāmitra's martial valour utterly failed to subdue the sage. In the end, the king was obliged to bow before hieratic influence and prestige and was constrained to acknowledge that the brute force of a Kṣatriya was no match for the spiritual power of a Brāhmaṇa (I. 56. 23). The story of King Triśaṅku (I. 57-60), on the other hand, shows how kings were sometimes made pawns in the hands of rival priests.

THE ECONOMIC PILLARS

With the Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas as the brains and arms of the Rāmāyaṇa society, the Vaiśyas provided the economic support to the elaborate structure of the *varṇāśrama*. Pursuit of wealth was the special avocation of the Vaiśyas. They reared cattle, tilled the land and were engaged in trade. Naturally, they bore the brunt of taxation,

As *dvijas*, the Vaiśyas too observed the same religious sacraments and rites as the Kṣatriyas and the Brāhmaṇas, and were allowed to recite the Vedas. The Vaiśya ascetic, Andhamuni, lamented how his son, killed by Daśaratha, would no longer regale him with his sonorous Vedic recitations (II. 64. 32). But the Vaiśyas along with the Kṣatriyas were not eligible for officiating as priests for others. As citizens, the Vaiśyas were undoubtedly the most influential section in Ayodhyā on account of their numbers and wealth. They had an important voice in the deliberations of the local bodies and representative assemblies.[1] Evidently, in the Vaiśya caste there must have been several occupational sub-sections organized into various corporations like *gaṇas* and *naigamas*.

THE "FOOTMEN"

In the caste hierarchy the Śūdras occupied the lowest position. Their function was to serve the other three castes (I. 6. 19). They were chiefly labourers and domestic servants. The Śūdra was, however, at times allowed the privilege of attending sacrificial ceremonies. Thus, Śūdras were invited in large numbers to attend Daśaratha's Aśvamedha (I. 13. 20). Yet, the Śūdra suffered from some disadvantages : he was not allowed to study the Vedas. A Brāhmaṇa, we have seen, would not impart Vedic instruction to a non-*dvija* (V. 28. 5), nor did the latter possess the right to perform sacrifices like the three higher *varṇas*. (Except in the Uttarakāṇḍa, there is no mention in the genuine Rāmāyaṇa of barring a Śūdra from performing penance). There are instances when performance of penance by perfected Śūdras was admired. Śabarī, to whom Rāma showed exceeding grace, belonged to the Śabara caste which was even outside the pale of Aryan society. Yet she is called a *tāpasī* and a *śramaṇī*. Rāma goes to her lovely hermitage, calls her a *tapodhanā* (one having penance for her treasure) and asks her if her *tapas* is in the ascendant. She is called a *siddhā*, an accomplished ascetic, and attains the highest abode of *maharṣis* by *ātma-samādhi* (III. 74. 6-10). Further, the boy, killed by Daśaratha's arrow, is recorded as having a Vaiśya for his father and a Śūdrā for his mother. Nevertheless, these are said to be *tapasvins* and their son calls himself a sage. Daśaratha calls the father a *muni* and *bhagavān*. Vālmīki calls the father a *vānaprastha* and a *brahmavādin*. What is more, the father directs the son's soul to the heavenly abode and his wish *is* fulfilled. He and his wife then pass away to heaven (II. 63-4).

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[1] See P. C. Dharmā : *The Rāmāyaṇa Polity*, Chapters III and VII.

All this is unthinkable in the rigid caste system of the Uttarakāṇḍa. There, a Śūdra like Śambūka, who dares to perform austerities with a view to attaining salvation, while still in body, is said to have been killed by Rāma with his own hands (VII. 76. 1-4). Does this show that a gradual deterioration had set in to mark out the Śūdras as degenerate and that the castes had become increasingly rigid ? If so, should he (Rāma), as the upholder of truth, not have stemmed the rot ? To such questions we cannot find a satisfactory answer.

UNTOUCHABLES

No untouchables or Cāṇḍālas are mentioned in the original Rāmāyaṇa. Only in the legends of the Bālakāṇḍa and Uttarakāṇḍa, which are of questionable validity, stray references are made to Cāṇḍālas as the lowest in the social scale and the most degraded beings of the time. They are described as possessing dark complexion, a rough body and short hair ; they put on blue clothes, deck themselves with iron ornaments, and are smeared all over with ashes from the funeral pyre (I. 58. 10-11). They evidently live outside the city in the vicinity of the crematorium. To the class of untouchables also belonged the Muṣṭikas who fed on dog-flesh, gathered dead men's clothes and had frightful, distorted frames and foul practices (I. 59. 19-20).

From the legend of Triśaṅku it can be gathered that untouchability or Cāṇḍālahood sometimes resulted from excommunication, from the *varṇāśrama* society, for committing certain grave crimes. For example, when Triśaṅku expressed his desire to let someone other than the Vāsiṣṭhas officiate at his sacrifice, the sons of Vasiṣṭha, in their rage, pronounced curse on him to become a Cāṇḍāla. Seeing him thus transformed, all the ministers ran away ; and a pandemonium followed (I. 58. 11-2). This story shows, firstly, that Cāṇḍālahood was not hereditary but could be occasioned by some grave breach of conduct ; and, secondly, that a Cāṇḍāla was one whose society or propinquity was shunned by the higher castes, and hence an untouchable.

CHANGE OF CASTE

In the Rāmāyaṇa age, the caste system was not altogether rigid; instances are not wanting of the progress of individuals from a lower to a higher caste. A case in point is the story of Viśvāmitra who, though of Kṣatriya descent, is said to have attained Brāhmaṇahood. And the story makes interesting reading.[1]

Viśvāmitra's ambition was to reach the same level as Vasiṣṭha who stood high as an ideally perfect Brāhmaṇa. Maybe there was more than one Viśvāmitra in Indian history and tradition. Taken together it indicates the tendency among Kṣatriya princes to aspire to the status of a *brahmarṣi*. In the Ṛgveda, Viśvāmitra appears as a court bard patronised by several non-Aryan kings. Eventually he challenged the superiority of Vasiṣṭha who is the priest of the blue-blooded Aryans (of the Tṛtsus under Sudās). In the battle, however, Viśvāmitra and party are defeated, and Vasiṣṭha triumphs ; but the struggle between the two sages is projected into the later ages. The two are seen again in the Rāmāyaṇa engaged in a quarrel over a cow, Śabalā, "the yielder of all that is desired." Foiled in his efforts to secure the cow, the combative Kṣatriya spirit is aroused in Viśvāmitra but he adopts the Brahmanic way, namely to discipline himself by self-restraint, mortification and abstinence. He betakes himself to a lonely forest and performs the most severe austerities but meets with formidable obstacles putting his mettle to severe test. These impediments appear in the form of Triśaṅku, Śunaḥśepa, Menakā and Rambhā. Viśvāmitra takes to much harder penances to reach perfection and gradually gets rid of the various shackles such as lust, anger, desire, pride and jealousy. He gets gradual recognition (from being a *mahārājā*) first as a *rajarṣi*, then as a *maharṣi* and finally as a *brahmarṣi*. Even so, he would not be satisfied unless Vasiṣṭha acknowledged him as his equal.

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[1] See S. V. Viswanatha : *Racial Synthesis of Hindu Culture*, pp. 134-9.

The merit of Viśvāmitra lies in that he is a wonderful example of one who worked his way to the highest bliss by dint of his own personal efforts in spite of natural predisposition to passion of every kind. His story amply illustrates how it was not easy yet possible for one endowed with enormous strength, power and wisdom to get elevated from the status of a Kṣatriya to that of a Brāhmaṇa. But the difficulties which Viśvāmitra had to face should be construed and assessed in psychological terms rather than in terms of social prejudices generally associated with them. The Brāhmaṇa *varṇa*, which is temperamentally rich in *sattva*, is diametrically opposed to the Kṣatriya *varṇa* with its predominance of rajasic qualities. Viśvāmitra had to undergo severe mental discipline and training in order to transform his rajasic nature (composed of *kāma* and *krodha*) into sāttvic virtues. It was thus not merely a question of change of function or occupation, it was also a problem of mental transformation. The barriers described against Viśvāmitra's change of caste were thus not social but psychic, as proved by the several "tests" he had to undergo in order to prove his Brāhmaṇahood. Vasiṣṭha, the great Brāhmaṇa sage, conceded to recognize Viśvāmitra as a Brāhmaṇa only when the latter's heart was purged of all vestiges of lust and anger.[1]

It was, thus, only as a result of very severe processes of self-discipline and interiorization that a Kṣatriya could achieve the spirituality of a Brāhmaṇa. What is, however, clear is that a change of caste was not impossible.

In the changed cultural conditions of the Uttarakāṇḍa, on the other hand, caste rigidity had stiffened. Change of

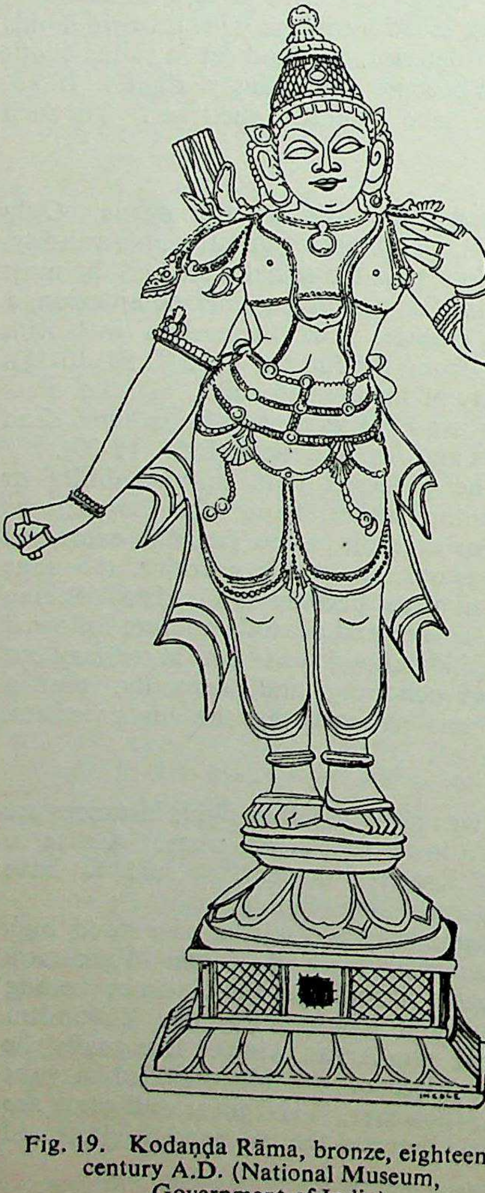

Fig. 19. Kodaṇḍa Rāma, bronze, eighteenth century A.D. (National Museum, Government of India).

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[1] P. H. Valavalkar : op. cit., p. 311.

caste or caste functions had become something unthinkable. Good kings were expected to prevent persons of a lower *varṇa* from entering into the spheres of the higher *varṇas*.

The incompetence of Brāhmaṇas to rule, and that of Kṣatriyas to officiate as sacrificial priests, is nevertheless recognized in the genuine Rāmāyaṇa which shows that the classification of functions for the different *varṇas* had resulted even in the early epic period in a sort of specialization with the consequence that persons of one caste were likely to prove misfits in the avocations of another.

In other ways, however, the Rāmāyaṇa testifies to the general happy relations subsisting between the different castes—a fact which is attributable to each caste adhering to its own special functions (*svakarma-nirata*). In the description of Ayodhyā, it is said that the Kṣatriyas were given the lead by the Brāhmaṇas and the Vaiśyas followed the Kṣatriyas, while the Śūdras performed their own duties and ministered to the three *varṇas*.[1] Another instance of inter-*varṇa* harmony is provided when Viśvāmitra asks Rāma to slay the demoness Tāṭakā for the welfare of the four *varṇas* (*cāturvarṇya-hitārtham*, I. 25. 17).

The *varṇa* organization of ancient India had thus the official sanction of the State and as such was made obligatory for people to adhere to. Lakṣmaṇa describes his father as one who ruled the four *varṇas* impartially according to the dictates of *dharma*, without prejudice in favour of or against any one of them (IV. 4. 6-7). Rāma showed mercy to all, old and young, of the four castes, and hence, they were all obedient to him (II. 17. 15). Hanumān describes him as the protector of the ideals of social groups living in a state of mutual interdependence and mutual service fostered by their common love of *dharma* (V. 35. 11). Such mutual harmony and service could come only by everyone adhering to and following a limited individual ideal without any envious fratricidal strife aspiring for something better (VI. 128. 100).

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[1] **Op. cit., p. 311.**

CHAPTER V

THE ARYAN WAY OF LIFE

Life, as conceived by ancient Aryan seers, was a continuous schooling in (and practice of) self-discipline. This period of schooling was divided by them into various stages called *āśramas*, upon which was erected the superstructure of man's mundane career.

Although passages from ancient works have been adduced by scholars to prove that originally there were only three *āśramas*,[1] during the period of the Rāmāyaṇa, their number had come to be recognized as four (II. 106. 21). They were (*i*) *brahmacarya-āśrama* of the celibate student, (*ii*) *gṛhastha-āśrama* of the householder, (*iii*) *vānaprastha-āśrama* of the retired, and (*iv*) *saṁnyāsa-āśrama* of the homeless ascetic. Every member of the three higher castes (*dvijas*) was expected to pass through these stages of life. "Each of these *āśramas* is a stage of life in which the individual has to train himself for a certain period and exert himself within the circuit in order to qualify himself for the next."[2] It appears from the Rāmāyaṇa that this order of *āśramas* was generally adhered to and any departure from it was looked upon with disfavour. Rāma's departure to the woods to lead forest-life evoked criticism from many on the ground that the *vānaprastha* life was ill-suited to one of his age and position (II. 106. 22).

In the *brahmacarya* stage, the student led a celibate life of rigorous self-discipline, rendering wholehearted service to his preceptor and studying sacred scriptures. The hermitages of Agastya, Bharadvāja and Vālmīki were peopled by hosts of disciples living under the guidance of their *kulapatis* or principals (II. 116. 4). As the course of studies came to a close, the student would take a holy bath, symbolic of his completion of *brahmacarya*, and was termed a *snātaka*. The Rāmāyaṇa mentions three kinds of *snātakas* : the *vidyā-snātaka* (II. 82. 11), the *vrata-snātaka* (V. 21. 17) and the *vidyā-vrata-snātaka* (II. 1. 20). The *vidyā-snātaka* is one who ends his student career as soon as his studies are completed but before he has been able to fulfil the *vratas* or vows laid down for the *brahmacārī*. The *vrata-snātaka*, on the other hand, is one who has fulfilled all the *vratas* satisfactorily but has not completed his studies. The *vidyā-vrata-snātaka* is one who ends his student career after completing both his studies as well as fulfilling his *vratas*. Both Rāma and Rāvaṇa were full-fledged *snātakas* of this last category (II. 1. 20 ; VI. 92. 60).

After the completion of the prescribed course of education, the *brahmacārī* entered the *gṛhasthāśrama* when he became a mature youth and hence fit to marry. This *āśrama* required of the householder that he discharge his debts to his ancestors and gods and guests by performing *śrāddhas*, sacrifices and *atithisatkāra* or hospitality. In no less wise was he called upon to support his elders, his wife and other members of the family. All religious ceremonies and sacrifices had to be performed in company with the wife rightly called the *dharma-patnī* (III. 34. 15) or *saha-dharma-cāriṇī* (III. 10. 21).

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[1] P. M. Modi : *Develpment of the System of Āśramas* (*Proceedings of VII Oriental Conference* 1933).

[2] P. H. Valavalkar : op. cit., p. 71.

Gṛhasthāśrama is acclaimed as the best of the four *āśramas* (II. 106. 22) and the Rāmāyaṇa itself is an epic *par excellence* of this stage of Aryan life. Its motive is the inculcation of the virtues of a householder's life as the primary means of encompassing one's spiritual welfare. The special eulogy bestowed upon this *āśrama* by the Rāmāyaṇa and, indeed, by all Hindu scriptures, is due to the fact that the householder lends support to the other three *āśramas* and makes direct contributions to social weal. It is the most fitting stage for fulfilling all obligations of life, individual as well as social.

Later comes a period when the householder is expected to retire from active pursuit of *artha* and *kāma* (wealth and pleasure) when his skin has started wrinkling, his hair turning grey, and his body waring old and decrepit from continuous toiling for worldly ends. If he has a worthy son, he delegates his powers to him and takes to a quiet and sequestered life. It was customary for kings to entrust the administration of the kingdom to their grown-up sons and take to ascetic life in the woods. King Daśaratha appealed to his assembly that he had become old and feeble, hardly able to bear the heavy brunt of the realm with royal dignity and, therefore, longed to rest after installing Rāma on the throne (II. 2. 9-10). Daśaratha does not expressly state that he would turn a *vānaprastha* after Rāma's enthronement. But there are several legends of kings like Vṛtra and Aṁśumān who took to austerities in the forest after entrusting their kingdoms to their sons. This practice is alluded to by Lakṣmaṇa also (II. 23. 26).

In the *vānaprastha* stage of life, the wife either stayed at home under the care of her sons or accompanied her husband to the forest (as in the case of Viśvāmitra). Greater number of ascetics, of whom mention has been made in the epic, were adherents of the *vaikhānasa-mārga*, leading an ascetic's life in the company of their wives.

The retired householder lived an abstemious and self-denying life in the woods, engaged in the welfare of all creatures, receiving alms, performing sacrifices and devoting himself to the study of the Vedas. He lived under a tree, with senses restrained, subsisting on easily procurable fruits and roots (V. 13. 38). He had nothing to do with weapons, whose contact sullied the intellect (III. 9. 23). Observance of *deśa-dharma* or duties and obligations prevailing in a particular locality was insisted upon (III. 9. 27).

As for the last *āśrama*, the *saṁnyāsa*, it must be noted that the word does not occur in the Rāmāyaṇa. Instead the words *bhikṣu* and *parivrājaka* are mentioned (III. 46. 2). It is not certain whether a *parivrājaka* was the same as a *saṁnyāsī or* whether this stage of life came after the *vānaprastha* or could be resorted to even earlier. The epic does not shed any light on this stage of life. When Rāvaṇa came to abduct Sītā in Pañcavaṭī, he had disguised himself in the dress of a *parivrājaka*. He carried an umbrella, a water-pot and a *yaṣṭi* (or stick). He is also described as having a tuft of hair (*śikhī*, III. 46. 3).

The scheme of the *āśramas* as devised by Hindu sages is only complementary to their scheme of the *varṇas*. Both are concerned with the organization and management of the individual as well as of the group or society, the difference being only in their manner of approach or emphasis. The theory of *varṇa* treats man as a social being and defines his rights and obligations with reference to his innate nature, tendencies and dispositions, having due regard for the larger group of which he is a member. In other words, it addresses itself to the man in the mass. The theory of *āśramas*, on the other hand, considers man as an individual and teaches him what his spiritual goal is, how he is to order his life and what are the necessary requisites for attaining this goal.[1]

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[1] See P. V. Kane : op. cit., p. 423 ; and P. H. Valavalkar : op. cit., p. 281.

The *varṇāśrama* theory showed its best fruits in the right ordering of the Rāmāyaṇa society by trying to harmonize the rival claims of the society and the individual and thus made possible their simultaneous progress without coming into conflict with one another. A study of the epic shows that .Vālmīki has everywhere placed the society above the individual, though, at the same time, he was ready to afford every scope for a free growth of the individual mind and character without disturbing the social order. Rāma's entire life was inspired by the principle of sacrificing a smaller circle of interests when wider ones had to be protected. Thus it was that when domestic interests clashed, he satisfied Kaikeyī and gave up his own right to the throne, just to avert a civil war which would have plunged the entire kingdom into a maze of disorder. The numerous baffling situations he was confronted with in life were solved, or at least smoothened, by him through his regard for truth and justice and his readiness to sacrifice his own interests to achieve the welfare of the society on a whole.

The Rāmāyaṇa further copiously exemplifies the social necessity of respecting the legitimate rights of others, and declares that anyone violating the rules is punishable by law. The couplet *ma niṣāda, etc.*, (I. 2.15), which is the starting point of the epic, teaches that we have no business to encroach upon the rights of others, even of the meanest things, to enjoy happiness in their own sphere and in their legitimate ways. King Daśaratha, who shot dead Andhamuni's son, was cursed by the sorrowing parents to share the same fate plainly because the king had interfered with the right of a blind family to live happily, or rather live as happy as they could, and suffered in consequence. Likewise was Śūrpaṇakhā punished as she was designing to encroach on the conjugal right of Sītā in tempting Rāma to marry herself. In the same way, Rāvaṇa brought destruction upon himself, his family and his friends because he had thoughtlessly violated the lawful right of Rāma and Sītā to live happily together.[1]

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[1] B. Barua : *Vālmīki as he reveals himself in his poem* (*Sir Asutosh Mukerji Silver Jubilee Volumes*, vol. iii, *Orientalia*, part i, p. 409).

CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSEHOLD

Family, being the fundamental and basic unit of all human institutions, is the starting point of social evolution. Although the family continues to be of immense importance, its value as an essential part of the social structure has diminished today as compared to earlier times. Its role in the cultural education of the individual, by moulding his personality for a proper discharge of his responsibilities as a member of society, is graphically exemplified by Vālmīki in his delineation of the family life of Daśaratha. Indeed, Rāmāyaṇa is an epic of the household. It is in the portrayal of domestic incidents, domestic affections and domestic jealousies, which are appreciated by king and peasant alike, that the epic appeals to the hearts of millions. It preserves some of the most ideal portrayals of family life in its diverse aspects as it existed in ancient India.

The Rāmāyaṇa pattern of the family was definitely patriarchal. It comprised the father or patriarch, his wife or wives, his unmarried daughters, and his sons with their wives and children. In the household, father was the head and master with absolute authority ; wife was the mistress but dependent on, and obedient to, the master. Sons and daughters were under absolute dominion of the father. Children, coming of age, could not choose their life-mates without reference to their father. For example, Rāma, though entitled to the hand of Sītā by virtue of having fulfilled the stipulation of bending the bow, declined to marry her without ascertaining the views of his father (II. 118. 51).

In secular and legal matters also father's word was law, and he disposed of his property among his sons as he liked. Daśaratha had given a firm promise to Kaikeyī's father that her issue would succeed him (Daśaratha) on the throne (II. 107. 3).[1] And when Bharata entreated Rāma at Citrakūṭa to accept the throne of Kosala, Rāma's reply was that Father alone was competent to decide either to make him stay in the woods or establish him on the throne (II. 101. 20).

Evidently, family was of the joint type in the sense that all members in it recognized the authority of one patriarch. In royal families, however, the king's wives and their sons lived separately in their own palaces and had their own dependents and retinue. But, in all important matters, they obeyed the decision of the head of the family who was either father or, in his absence, the eldest of his sons. Rāma is depicted as living apart from his parents after marriage (II. 16) ; but, all the same, he ungrudgingly obeys his father's command for exile. When he takes over the reins of government, Rāma, in his turn, only exercises his benevolent overall authority over the joint family consisting of his brothers and their wives and children (VII. 45. 22).

Family, as a social unit, has already assimilated through generations the traditions, sentiments and modes of behaviour of the society. It, therefore, plays the part of a suitable medium to convey these to its members. What is repeatedly stressed in the epic is the supreme necessity of preserving and following the traditions and usages which the family had built up in the past, and of keeping one's personal interests subordinate to the collective good of the group. The epic is replete with instances of how men of good extraction always insist on faithful adherence to the cultural heritage of their families King Daśaratha prides before his assembly over the fact that he had followed in the footsteps of his ancestors in protecting the people with vigilant care (II. 2. 6).

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[1] For instance, Viśvāmitra disinherited his refractory son and adopted a stranger, Śunaḥśepa (I. 62). Yayāti disregarded four elder sons and handed the crown to the youngest, Puru.

The plea that Rāma puts forth in persuading his mother to permit him to go into exile, at his father's behest, is that he is "merely journeying on the road chalked out and traversed by the great seers of old"(II. 21. 36). When Kaikeyī gives precedence to her own interests and of her son over the reputation of the celebrated Ikṣvāku family, Daśaratha sees through that "nothing but foul disorder and disgrace is in store for that ancient righteous race" (II. 12. 19). Kaikeyī's insistence on the exile of Rāma for fourteen years and Bharata's installation on the throne is a flagrant disavowal of the established traditions of the family, which evokes consternation among all right thinking people. The minister Sumantra reproves Kaikeyī, saying : "Usually, on the death of the king, the princes succeed to the kingdom one after another according to age ; this custom it is thy endeavour to render nugatory even while the lord of the Ikṣvāku race is still alive" (II. 35. 9). Any act that was *amaryāda* (II. 35. 11), or derogatory to the prestige of the family, was invariably condemned. Kaikeyī is repeatedly censured as *kulaghnī* (II. 35. 6) and *kulapāṁsanī* (II. 37. 22) for bringing disgrace on the family. Bharata, on the other hand, is eulogized for his refusal to subscribe to the transgression of family traditions brought about by his mother. When, after Rāma's departure to the forest, the assembled ministers invite Bharata to assume the throne, he replies : "In our line, it is deemed fit for the first-born alone to perform the task of governing" (II. 79. 7).

In such a set-up, it is not surprising that the son occupy a pre-eminent position, for he is the continuer of the line (*vaṁśakaraḥ sutaḥ*, I. 38. 12). The necessity of having a son is emphasized also "from the religious point of view " The son salvages the souls of his deceased ancestors from the hell into which they might otherwise fall. "Because the son rescues the ancestors from the hell, called *put*, he has been called a *putra*" (II. 107. 12).

Fathers beget well-wishing sons for the compassing of their welfare in the next world (I. 62. 9). The birth of a son is taken to be specially contributory towards helping the father to get absolved from his debt to the manes (*pitṛ-ṛṇa*, II. 4. 14), one of the three debts (the other two being to gods and guests) which every householder has to discharge. Thus, sage Bharadvāja tells Bharata : "Thy father Daśaratha hath been freed from his debts since he hath a son like unto thee attached to virtue" (II. 113. 17).

It was, therefore, but natural for parents to feel acute distress in the absence of a son (II. 12. 111). Penances were performed and sacrifices offered with a view to getting progeny. Daśaratha performed a horse-sacrifice for obtaining sons who would perpetuate his race (I. 12. 9). It is stressed in the epic that a worthy son could be obtained only by prolonged penance, by leading a righteous life, and by performing religious rites and ceremonies. It was by virtue of mighty austerities, uncommon exertions, and various kinds of prowess and incantations that Daśaratha obtained a son like Rāma endowed with every auspicious sign (II. 86. 12). He deemed his life blessed with glory in having obtained a worthy son (II. 4. 13). There are several legends of women undergoing penance for the sake of progeny. Parents performed auspicious and propitiatory rites for the welfare of their sons. When Rāma was summoned by Daśaratha to Kaikeyī's palace on the day of his proposed coronation ceremony, Rāma thought that his father, in consultation with his step-mother, was contemplating some benedictory rite in connection with his installation (II. 16. 15).

The son was looked upon as the great bond of affection in the family, the centre to which the love of parents converged. "There is none dearer to the parents than the son." He is "like one's own image reflected in a mirror" (II. 3. 38). Daśaratha's deep love for Rāma has been graphically painted by the poet : "I shall rather abandon Kausalyā and Sumitrā, or even my glory, nay, my own life, but never shall I abandon Rāma who is always fond of his parents. Just to see my eldest son is itself the highest bliss and if I see him not I lose my life. The world may stand sunless, the grain may thrive without the genial rain, but if my Rāma be not nigh, my spirit from its frame shall fly" (II. 12. 12-4). Daśaratha demonstrated the truth of these sentiments by actually dying as a result of separation from his son. The parents of the ascetic youth, who met an untimely death at the hands of Daśaratha, also forsook their lives out of grief for their son. Such is the depth of paternal love.

If a son is thus an object of great affection in an Aryan family, the eldest son is the more so "on racial and sentimental grounds." Of the four sons of Daśaratha, it was the eldest, Rāma, who was his father's apple of the eye (I. 20. 11; 18. 24). The fact of his being the worthy son of a worthy first-queen was another factor in Rāma's favour (II. 3. 39-40). When Viśvāmitra approached Daśaratha to allow him to take Rāma for protecting his sacrifices, the king begged of the sage to spare Rāma, since he was his eldest child (I. 20. 12). Kaikeyī was doubtless the most beloved queen, but Rāma was dearer still (II. 11. 5). Even while promising Kaikeyī that he would fulfil her wish, whatever that might be, Daśaratha swore solemnly on Rāma (II. 11. 6-8).

The eldest son, accordingly, enjoyed a vantage position in matters of succession as compared to his younger brothers. The law of primogeniture entitled him to succeed to the throne after his father in preference to the other sons of the king (II. 73. 22). Also, it was his special privilege to offer the funeral cake at the *śrāddha* ceremony of Father, of all his forbears. This is why Bharata, after apprising Rāma at Citrakūṭa of the demise of Daśaratha, requests him to offer *śrāddha* to Father since he is the eldest son, and the dearest too ; for, as the wise say, oblation offered by the eldest son becomes imperishable in the world of manes (II. 102. 8).

Marriage of the eldest son was given priority and a younger brother, who married before his elder brother, was known as *parivettā* and condemned to punishment in hell (IV. 17. 36). The younger brothers were enjoined to honour and respect the eldest brother like a father. They were to be entirely subservient to his commands (II. 73. 27). When Kumbhakarṇa gave a sermon to Rāvaṇa in his assembly, on the right policy of kings, the latter resented his junior's presumptions, and claimed from the younger brother same respect as to a preceptor (VI. 63. 23). Bharata is described as *jyeṣṭhānuvartī* (II. 4. 26), or follower of the commands of his elders. Sumitrā's sermon to Lakṣmaṇa, on the eve of his departure with Rāma to the forest is sufficiently illustrative of the high regard in which the eldest son was held by the younger sons of the family (II. 40. 5-9). In his turn, now it was the obligation of the eldest brother to treat his younger brothers as his own sons.

As has already been said, parents occupied an exalted position in the filial regard of their sons. The word *pitā* (father, II. 30. 38) is derived from *pā*, to protect or preserve; and *pitā*, therefore, etymologically means a protector. This derivative meaning of the word is in a way indicative of the most important obligation of a father with reference to his offspring, *viz.*, to look after the helpless young ones and give them care and protection ; and the little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love of the parents were deemed impossible for the son to repay. On Rāma's own testimony, "What the father and mother always do for their son, and what they effect by looking after his food, sleep, clothing, sweet speech and sport, who can tell, measure, even describe or repay these kindly acts ?" And further : "How should a man act wrongly against him in whom he sees the root of his life and who, to him, is a visible godhead ?" (II. 111. 9-10 ; 18. 16).

Obedience to father and mother was the bounden duty of the sons (II. 30. 32). Parents were veritable godheads for the younger generation in the family. "Nothing could be more paradoxical," it is laid down, "than to pay no heed to one's father, mother and preceptor who are actually with us, and worship and please, instead, the gods whose presence we are not aware of. In the worship of the parents are fulfilled the triple objects of human pursuit (*dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*) and the adoration of the three regions. The earth has no holier thing than those whom with all love men seek to please. Truth, alms-giving, reverence and sacrifice with profuse gifts—none is conducive to so much strength and happiness as pleasing service to one's father. Heaven, wealth, grain, learning, son and many another blessing—nothing remains inaccessible to those who follow the wishes of their parents. Those noble souls, who are ever bent on pleasing their father and mother, reach the regions of the Devas and Gandharvas, not missing even Goloka and Brahmaloka" (II. 30. 32-7).

Inspired by such lofty ideals, Rāma, who had willingly agreed to be exiled to the forest in deference to his father's promise to Kaikeyī, said : "Whatever commands may be issued by my father, who remains steadfast in the path of virtue, I wish to abide by them. Such, indeed, is the eternal *dharma*. I cannot decline to go to the forest ; for, my father's behest, the oath he swore and the claims of truth—all lead me thither. I disdain to preserve my life by transgressing my father's command" (II. 30. 38, 31-2). Rāma is said to have departed for his exile protected by the truth and merit of constant service to his parents (II. 25. 6).

Examples also exist of sons carrying out the word of their father without even ascertaining its propriety And, thus it was that Rāma told Kaikeyī : "At the bidding of the king, I would even plunge into the fire, I would even drink virulent poison or drown myself in the ocean, provided I am asked to do it by him who is bent on my welfare and who is my *guru*, father and king in one" (II. 18. 29). Before his own mother, Rāma vehemently advocates the necessity of obeying the behests of father even if they be the outcome of anger, or joy, or passion (II. 21. 59). Sage Kaṇḍu, in obedience to his father's command, killed a cow even though he knew it was sinful to do so (II. 21. 31). A son, indeed, had no power to disobey his father (II. 21. 30-4).

Question arises : Who is entitled to greater claims on the filial loyalty of the son, as between mother and father, especially when their biddings are at variance with one another's. Of course, the obligation owed by the son to both of them seems patent. Anyway the epic, on the whole, gives priority to the father's desires and emphasizes their fulfilment in preference to the mother's. This is clear from the conversation between Rāma and Kausalyā when the former sought her permission to depart to the forest. Kausalyā, claiming that she was as much entitled by her right and love to his veneration and regard as the king himself, could not make him swerve from proceeding to the forest ; she had even cited as a precedent the instance of Kaśyapa who stayed in his house serving diligently his mother and, coupled with his peerless penance, attained heaven (II. 21. 52, 24-5). In reply, Rāma said that it was his foremost duty to obey his father even if that meant disobedience to his mother. And, in support of his contention, he gave the instance of Paraśurāma who, blindly following the command of his father, chopped off the head of his mother with an axe. Though full of the tenderest love for his mother, Rāma held his father's word to be more honourable than the mother's ; for, none indeed, said he, who obeys his father's command, comes to grief or degradation thereby (II. 21. 33, 37). And *Śukranīti* has even said that it was through the strength of their father's nepances that Paraśurama got back his mother alive and Rāma got back his throne whilst, due to their disobedience of the father's commands, the sons of Yayāti and of Viśvāmitra came to suffer degradation to the lowest position in life.[1] Generally speaking, however, both the parents in a patriarchal society have to be respected by the offspring with equal reverence (II. 101. 21), the father traditionally getting a little edge or preference.

In royal families, the eldest son, after marriage, was associated with the father in his business of government. Rāma, after marrying Sītā, is described as assisting Daśaratha in his administrative functions (I. 77. 21-2). As the king grew older, the care of the household and the State fell on the shoulders of the heir-apparent, naturally.

The two primary instincts, parental and sexual, have worked as the chief foundation of the family from the very dawn of civilization. It is, however, the concern of the social group or community to see to it that these two instincts are so channelled as to make them socially useful. Parental instinct involved much sacrifice in the form of heavy and unremitting toil on behalf of the offspring. The injunction for the *gṛhastha* to abdicate in old age in favour of his sons indicates how the lure for personal possession was sought to be suppressed in favour of the larger consideration of the future economic prosperity and smooth continuity of the family. Similarly, sex instinct was made socially useful by being kept under control through the agencies of law, moral and religious sanctions, customs and usages which tended to sublimate the desire for romantic love to a yearning for racial perpetuity.[2]

The strength and excellence of Aryan culture lay in the inculcation of domestic virtues. The Rāmāyaṇa presents before the reader's vision a whole galaxy of ideally affectionate and amicable relations subsisting among the members of a joint-family. The relations between father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother, parents-in-law and daughters-in-law, have all been set forth by Vālmīki in his portrayal of the family life of Daśaratha. They are the patterns to which posterity has tried more and more to approximate. It is true that the instance of Kaikeyī presents a highly malignant spot in an otherwise amicable household ; but, it is particularly because of *her* abnormal behaviour and vicious conduct that the excellences of the other members of the family have come out in bold relief. In Daśaratha is depicted an ideal father, in Rāma an ideal son, in Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata two ideal brothers, and in Kausalyā and Sītā two ideal wives. No study of the Rāmāyaṇa culture would be complete without a full appreciation of the family conduct of these figures.

The natural affection between Rāma and his three brothers was of the purest and most unselfish kind ever witnessed (II. 8. 19). There was no jealousy among them, no attempt to bypass one another, no feeling at any time for competition in any respect. Rāma always has the welfare of his brothers at heart. While instructing Sītā about her duties at home, during his absence in the forest, he lays particular stress on her care for Bharata and Śatrughna "who are dearer to me than my own life" (II. 26. 33). His love for his brothers is well expressed in his discussion at Citrakūṭa while he is being prevailed upon by them to return to the Capital (II. 97. 5-6, 8, 11).

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[1] *Śukra*, II. 78-9, 83-5, referred to in P. H. Valavalkar : op. cit., p. 25.

[2] P. H. Valavalkar : op. cit., pp. 204-5.

It was Lakṣmaṇa, however, who was particularly attached to his eldest brother with bonds of the most intimate, self-denying and steadfast affection. Vālmīki says: "He was like a second self to Rāma; only he functioned outside Rāma's body" (I. 18. 30). Rāma's love for Lakṣmaṇa even exceeded the love he bore for Sītā. There are places in the Rāmāyaṇa where Rāma declares that Sītā is not so high in his affections as Lakṣmaṇa (VI. 49. 6; 101. 14). Sītā herself tells Hanumān at Laṅkā that Lakṣmaṇa is dearer to her husband than she is (V. 38. 60) For Lakṣmaṇa Rāma was more than a brother: "I do not consider Daśaratha my father. To me Rāma is a brother, he is my protector, he is my relation, *he is* my father" (II. 58. 31). But, at one place in the Rāmāyaṇa, there is a curious reversal of this. Pleased at the services of Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma says: "When Daśaratha died, he really did not leave me a loser; he left an image of him in thee. I find in thee what I should have found in my father if he had lived" (III. 15. 29).

The relations between Bharata and Rāma are also often held out as another pattern of brotherly love. Rāma gladly relinquishes his claims to the throne of Kosala in Bharata's favour, but Bharata shows himself the greater hero by refusing to exercise his claim that now *de jure* belonged to him.

Barring the singular instance of Kaikeyī's insistence on sending Rāma into exile, the queens of Daśaratha lived amicably together. Kausalyā treated Kaikeyī as if she were her own sister (II. 73. 10). Sumitrā relegated herself to a humble position in the palace, identifying her interests with those of Kausalyā and taking pride in letting her son to be completely devoted to his elder brother. Before her beguilement by Mantharā, even Kaikeyī regarded Rāma as her own son, and he was equal in her estimation to the noble Bharata (II. 12. 8, 21). Rāma, too, made little or no distinction between his own mother and his step-mothers, and there was none in Daśaratha's large household, who had a word of complaint against him (II. 12. 27).

Thus, respect for the parents, affection for the children, love among the brothers, fidelity of the married couple, loyalty to past traditions and grateful remembrance of ancestors were the common bonds that held the members of a family together. A Hindu home is the dwelling place, not only of the living members of the family, but also of the *pitṛs*, the ancestors, under the care and blessing of Agni, the fire-god, the presiding deity of the home. The *pañca-mahā-yajñas* (five daily sacrifices) have to be performed in the presence of Agni. All the predecessors are to be remembered every day at the time *pitṛa-yajña*. In such a pious atmosphere the ancient Aryan family, being based on a complex of the most profound impulses of our organic nature, those of mating, procreation, maternal love and paternal care, worked for the weal of the society.[1]

Disintegration of the family was supposed to be a great calamity that could befall anyone. While painting the possible horrors of *arājakatā* (anarchy), Vālmīki says that in a kingless State, family life and morality fall to the lowest depths; father and son fight each other, and wives get out of hand (II. 67. 10).

The profound influence exercised by life in the family upon the moulding of the character of the individual is recognized by the Rāmāyaṇa. The *kula* (III. 47. 24) or family was the nursery "where the individual learned his lessons in affection—lessons in giving respect to elders, lessons in subserving individual inclinations and aspirations towards the attainment of collective ends."[2] The exemplary conduct of Rāma had its deep roots in the moral training he had received in the family of Daśaratha.

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[1] **P. H. Valavalkar : op. cit., p. 211.**

[2] **Op. cit., p. 255.**

He developed in his home ennobling qualities like charity, asceticism, abstemiousness, friendliness, purity, straightforwardness, knowledge and obedience to elders (II. 12. 30). In the family, Rāma learnt "to win his subjects with truth, the poor with his gifts, the elders with his services and the enemies with his bow in battle" (II. 12. 29). His upright and suave conduct before friend and foe, his adherence to morality in the most critical situations, his courage of conviction, his freedom from malice and untruth, his charity and largeheartedness, his service to humanity, and his belief in universal brotherhood and love of living beings – principles which he steadfastly held throughout his chequered career—must be logically traced to the co-operation he fostered and got in his family life. The life of Rāma is, in fact, a glorious illustration of the psycho-social influences of family on the individual.

CHAPTER VII

MARRIAGE AND MORALS

Marriage fills all too important a chapter in the life of an individual. In India, it is the foundation of the *gṛhasthāśrama*—the bed-rock of family structure. Manu considers it a social institution for the regulation of proper relations between the sexes (IX. 25). In the Rāmāyaṇa society, it was firmly established on a traditional and sacramental basis. For normal purposes, marriage (*vivāha*) had come to be regarded as desirable for every person for the sake of family stability, sexual happiness and spiritual salvation. For women especially it was deemed to be nothing short of a sacramental new birth ; as a man of a higher caste is considered twice-born at his *upanayana*, so is a woman through marriage (V. 19. 10).

References to pre-marital relationship are almost absent in the Rāmāyaṇa. The bride and the bridegroom were usually unacquainted with each other until marriage. Girls of the upper classes lived a secluded life and had few opportunities of meeting any suitors. Sītā, Mandodarī, daughters of Kuśanābha, and Śāntā, wife of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, did not meet their husbands before marriage. Courting of unmarried girls is nowhere mentioned in the epic as successful—or even welcomed by the girls themselves. Pre-marital relations were always contemptuously spurned by girls of noble extraction, as is evident from the legend of Kuśanābha's daughters, Arajā and Vedavatī.

The various limitations to contract marriage, which sprang in the wake of the elaboration and complication of the caste system, are not to be met with in the epic. Except that equality in lineage (I. 33. 10) was generally sought in settling marriage alliances, no hard and fast restrictions were imposed. The limitations in the form of *gotra*, *pravara*, *sapiṇḍa* relationships, etc., may have existed, but there is no textual authority as to their prevalence.

Inter-caste marriages were not unknown. The marriage of Śāntā, a Kṣatriya princess, and Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, a Brāhmaṇa ascetic, is an instance of *anuloma vivāha* or the marriage of a man of a higher caste to a woman of a lower one (I. 10. 32). The Vaiśya Andhamuni had a Śudrā for his wife (II. 63. 50). The age of the Uttarakāṇḍa seems to have been prolific in *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriages. The marriage of Yayāti and Devayānī was a *pratiloma vivāha*—a man of lower caste being wedded to a woman of a higher one.

Marriage unions in the Rāmāyaṇa age, usually settled by parents, offered little scope for the free play of the bride's and bridegroom's volition. Daughters were content to be entirely subservient to the will of their father (*pitṛvaśā*). They did not regard themselves free to choose their husbands, as they felt such a procedure would be disrespectful to their parents and, hence, unthinkable. For instance, when Vāyu, the wind-god, proposed directly to the daughters of Kuśanābha, they firmly retorted : "May the time never come, O fool, when we, scorning our truth-speaking father, make use of *svayaṁvara* (self-choice) after our own will ; he to whom our father—our lord and sire—gives us shall be our husband" (I. 32. 21-2). Similarly, when King Daṇḍa made overtures to Arajā, daughter of sage Śukra, she refused to offer herself over to him and advised him to seek her from her father (VII. 80. 9-11). Thus it was always the girl's father who was to be approached for her hand, and girls always abided by their father's decision in the selection of their husbands. Scores of kings, for instance, sought the hand of Sītā from her father, King Janaka, who offered his daughters, Sītā and Ūrmilā, to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa without apparently asking their consent (I. 66. 15-6).[1]

It may be interesting to be told that *svayaṁvara* as popularly understood—the selection by the bride of a bridegroom from amongst a host of suitors assembled for the purpose—was not practised in India in the Rāmāyaṇa age. But, the form of *svayaṁvara*, wherein the bride was bestowed on one who performed an outstanding deed of prowess at a contest, was certainly prevalent. In such a case, the bride had very little or no freedom of choice. Once the specified deed had been performed she had to accept the successful hero. At her so-called *svayaṁvara* (II. 118. 38), the selection of Sītā's husband did not depend on her free choice. The whole function was arranged by the father in such a way that she was to be wedded to the suitor who showed a certain skill as a warrior. Moreover, the selection was confined to a panel of princes assembled or invited (I. 66. 17-8).

What applied to the girls was largely true of the boys also; the selection of their wives was made by their parents. King Daśaratha contemplated the marriage of his sons after they had completed their studies (I. 18. 36-8). Rāma havings napped Śiva's bow, and thus becoming entitled to the hand of Sītā, Janaka at onces ent messengers to Daśaratha to seek his assent to the alliance (I. 68. 27).

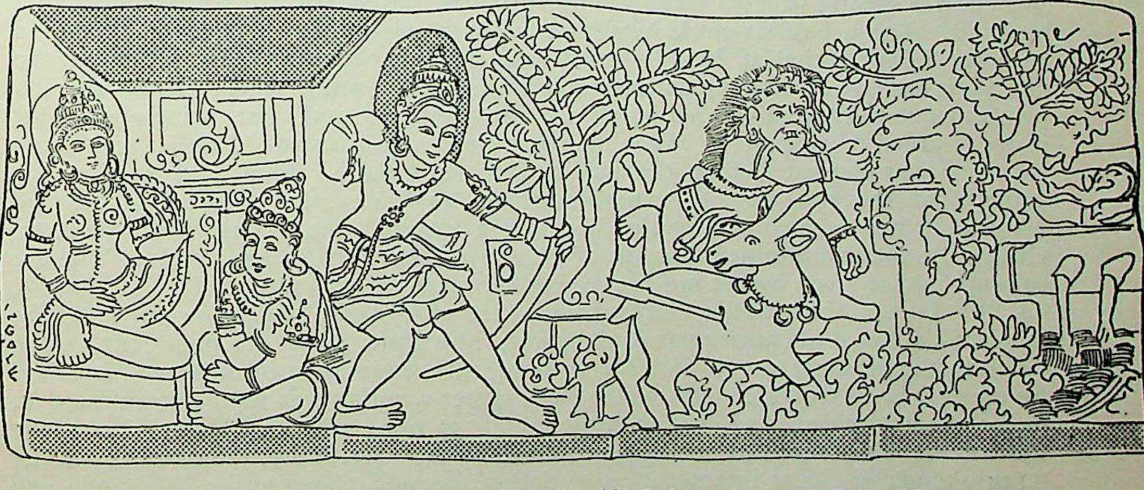

Fig. 20. Rāma follows the golden hart to shoot it while Lakṣmaṇa guards Sītā. Meanwhile the Rākṣasa Mārica appears out of the stricken deer and calls out in the voice of Rāma to entice Sītā. Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

In spite of the fact that parental authority was supreme, few marriages were unhappy on that account. The marriages of Sītā and Mandodarī proved happy even though it was their fathers had selected their husbands for them. Sītā is described as Rāma's beloved for the primary reason that she is a wife secured with his father's consent (I. 77. 26).

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[1] Sumālī instructed his daughter Kaikasī to offer herself to sage Viśravā, as she had not been accepted by anybody in spite of her youth (VII. 9. 8, 12). Kaikasī is said to have done so not of her free will, but at the command of her father (*pitṛ-gauravāt*, VII. 9. 14). Tṛṇabindu gave his daughter as an alms-gift to sage Pulastya (VII. 2. 25). Mandodarī was bestowed by her father Maya on Rāvaṇa whom he met accidentally (VII. 12. 18-9). Kuśanābha's daughters were given away in marriage by their father to Brahmadatta (I. 33. 21). None of these girls was asked to choose her husband.

At times, agencies other than the parents were also instrumental in bringing about marriage alliances. Viśvāmitra was mainly responsible for the matrimonial alliance between the houses of Ayodhyā and Mithilā. The nieces of Janaka, too, were likewise given away in marriage to Bharata and Śatrughna at his suggestion (I. 72. 9, 11).

A close study of the numerous references to and descriptions of marriage in the Rāmāyaṇa clearly suggests that girls were considered marriageable after they had attained puberty. Take the case of Sītā and her sisters : the epic describes the consummation of their marriages as having taken place immediately after the return of the couples to Ayodhyā (I. 77. 14), thus showing they were fully grown up at the time of their wedlock.

There is, however, a passage in the Araṇyakāṇḍa which seems to contradict this evidence and suggest a child-marriage in Sītā's case. In her talk with Rāvaṇa at Pañcavaṭī, Sītā informs him that at the time Rāma was banished from Ayodhyā, she was eighteen years of age and that her marriage had taken place twelve years earlier (III 47. 4). This would mean that Sītā was a child of six at the time of her marriage. But the unreliability of this is borne out by a host of other data in the epic itself. The consummation of Sītā's marriage referred to above is hardly conceivable as of a child-bride of six. On her own earlier account, Sītā's father, Janaka, was greatly worried when she had attained an age fit for being united to a husband. The age of six could hardly be taken to mean this. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that a long interval had elapsed between Sītā's attaining the marriageable age and her actual marriage with Rāma, during which period various princes came to try and win her hand, saw the great bow and, not being able to lift it up, returned disappointed. They then combined and invested Mithilā, and more than one year elapsed before the investment was raised. Thus, Sītā was mature enough at the time of her actual marriage to Rāma, for Janaka proclaimed his *paṇa* or marriage vow on finding her having attained the fit age for marriage. Obviously, she had attained that age of discretion also when she could imbibe the salutary advice given by her mother during her marriage ceremony (II. 118. 34, 44, 43. 8). Janaka himself tells Viśvāmitra that scores of kings have come to seek the hand of his youthful (*vardhamānā*) daughter, but gone away disappointed, having failed in the physical test (I. 66. 15-9). Thus, the consensus of evidence furnished by the epic leads to the conclusion that Sītā at her wedding was a full-grown maiden, fit for conjugal union, endowed with the faculty of prudence, and fully initiated by her parents with regard to her wifely responsibilities. Evidently, the passage in the Araṇyakāṇḍa is a later interpolation.[1] Several legends related in the Bālakāṇḍa and Uttarakāṇḍa also emphasize post-puberty marriages of girls. [The daughters of Kuśanābha —who were versed in the arts of music and dancing, could administer a stern rebuke to the forward Vāyu, audacious enough to make improper advances to them, and could exercise their judgment in adopting a course becoming the dignity of their house—could not possibly have been child-brides when they were married, later on, to Brahmadatta. The very fact that Vāyu felt himself drawn towards them, and thought of proposing to them, shows that they must have been adults fit for marriage (I. 32-3). Sage Pulastya, in order to keep off the damsels, who used to disturb his penance in the hermitage of Tṛṇabindu, is said to have uttered a curse that any girl visiting the place would at once become enceinte. The girls understood the significance of the curse and desisted from approaching the place for fear of being some day found to have become illegitimate mothers. Obviously, these girls must have been grown-up maidens, conscious of womanhood. The marriage of Tṛṇabindu's daughter to Pulastya was clearly a post-puberty marriage, as she had attained the child-bearing age and was even manifesting symptoms of pregnancy (VII. 2). Tāṭakā was married to Sunda at the budding prime of her youth (I. 25. 8). The girls of the forest in their fathers' ascetic abodes, so often met by kings and priests (*e.g.*, Arajā), were all practically well-developed and full-grown.]

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[1] **A. S. Altekar :** *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, p. 63.

As with girls, so with boys too : they married only when they had attained "age." Daśaratha as a *yuvarāja*, till he accidentally killed Andhamuni's son, was unmarried (II. 63. 14). Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were both *samupasthita-yauvana* at the time of their marriage ; they were in possession of a roubst, full-blooded personality which at once attracted attention (I. 48. 2-6). However, considerable disparity in the ages of husband and wife is sometimes noticed. Marriage of young girls to old men was not unknown. The relationship between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī is an instance of a superannuated husband, uxoriously fond of his youthful wife, pouring fabulous praises and promises into the ears of his mistress. Similarly, old Trijaṭa, too, had a youthful wife.

One of the primary purposes underlying marriage was to ensure suitable progeny, and the parents took good care to see that their sons and daughters got best life-partners. The matches of Rāma and Sītā, and of Lakṣmaṇa and Ūrmilā, were ideally suited, by all means fit and worthy of their wealth and grace (I. 72. 3). On seeing Sītā for the first time in Rāvaṇa's Aśokavana, Hanumān exclaimed that Rāma certainly deserved to have for his wife the dark-eyed Sītā : for, as regards their character, age, conduct, family and other auspicious marks, they were equals (V. 16. 5).

"A good bride is considered one that can turn a befitting (*anurūpā*) wife. She should have attained the youthful age fit for conjugal union with her husband (*pati-saṁyoga-sulabham vayaḥ*, II. 118. 34). Also, she should be an unwooed maiden, pure and chaste" (II. 30. 8 ; VI. 125. 44). Virginity was highly prized and insisted upon. "She should be from a respectable line (VI. 125. 45), endowed with youth, beauty and grace, perfect in body, mind and temperament" (I. 32. 12, 14-5 ; V. 20. 3). Among the wives of Rāvaṇa, it is said, there was none who was low-born, of inferior form, unaccomplished, unadorned or not beloved of her lord (V. 9. 71).

Considerable importance was attached to the possession of auspicious features by the bride (*śubhalakṣaṇā*). The nature of these marks, as a belief in the age, can be gathered from Sītā's lament over the supposed death of her husband. Says she :"I do not see on my body the marks as a result of which unlucky women are doomed to widowhood. My hair is fine, smooth and black ; my brows do not run together ; my legs are rounded and not hairy ; my teeth are close-set ; my temples, eyes, hands, feet, ankles and thighs are well-proportioned and have a fitting fulness ; my fingers have gradually-rounded nails, they are smooth and well-proportioned. My breasts show nogap in-between, swell up plumply and have the nipples set deep. My navel is well-sunk and (at the edges) raised up. My sides and my breasts are hard and well-filled. My colour is like that of a precious stone and the down-hair on my body is soft. I stand firm on my 'all twelves' (ten toes and two soles) and so I am called a woman with lucky bodily shape. The lotus marks on my feet proclaim me as belonging to the class of high-born ladies installed on the throne along with their husbands" (VI. 48. 7-14).

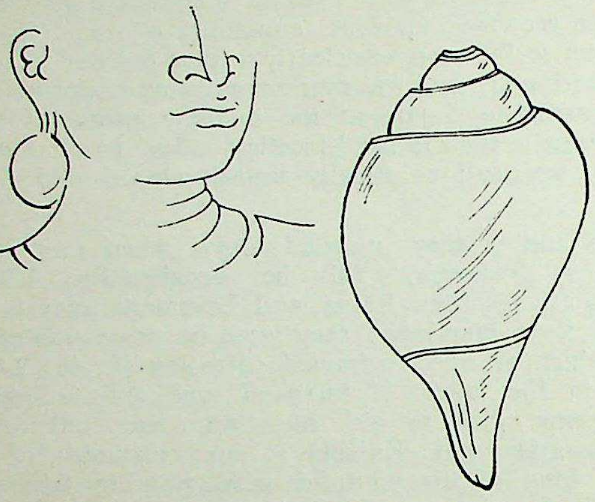

Fig. 21. A neck marked with three lines like a shell.

The bridegroom, on the other hand, should be of pure habits (*śubhācāra*) with the vital fluid well preserved (*ūrdhvaretāḥ*). The emphasis on the bride's virginity was balanced by an equal insistence on the pre-nuptial chastity of the groom. The stress on the *sadṛśatva* (similarity) of the bridal couple necessarily postulates by analogy the chastity of the boy no less than the virginity of the girl. Then, the groom must have attained superlative manhood and must have completed his studies. Austerities, valour, strength, wealth, brilliance and fame were other qualifications sought in a bridegroom. Rāvaṇa vainly considered himself better qualified in respect of these than Rāma to claim the love of Sītā (V. 20. 34).

It was a handsome (*abhirūpa*) husband that was always sought by parents for their daughter. The traits indicating beauty and luck in men are described by Hanumān in his address to Sītā at the Aśoka grove. He says : "Rāma is broad-shouldered, large-armed, has a conch-like neck and a beautiful countenance. His throat is plump (fig. 21) and his eyes are reddish. He has the voice of a bugle, is of a pleasing complexion and highly powerful, has equally proportioned limbs and a bluish complexion. His three limbs (thigh, fist and wrist) are hard ; his brow, arms and scrotum are long ; his tops of the hair, scrotum and knee-joints are proportionate ; his navel, abdomen and breast are high ; his angles of the eyes, nails and palms are copper-coloured ; his foot-lines, hair and organ are agreeable ; and his voice, navel and gait are grave. His belly and throat have three folds of skin. The soles of the feet, the lines thereon and the nipples are equally blended. His neck, organ, back and thighs are small. He has three locks of hair on his head. He has four lines on his thumb indicating his proficiency in the four Vedas. He is four cubits tall. His arms, thighs, chest and cheeks are plump. His eye-brows, hollows of the nose, eyes, ears, lips, nipples, wrists, knee-joints, scrotum, hips, hands, feet, shoulders and teeth are all equally proportioned. Four teeth, by the side of each row, are gifted with auspicious marks of the *śāstras*. His gait is elegant like that of a lion, tiger, elephant, or bull. His lips and jaws are fleshy and elevated. His nose is long (fig. 22). His words, countenance, nails, down and skin are all cool His arms, two little fingers, thighs and legs are long, and his face, eyes, mouth, tongue, lips, palate, nipples, nails, hands and feet are like lotuses His breast, head, forehead, neck, arms, shoulders, navel, feet, back and ears are spacious. He is gifted with grace, fame and affluence, and his paternal and maternal races are pure. His arm-pit, belly, breast, nose, shoulders and forehead are high. His fingers, hair, down, nails, skin, beard, eyesight and intellect are thin and sharp" (V. 35. 15- 0).

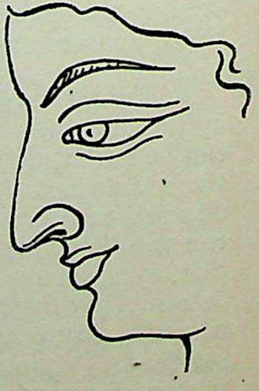

Fig. 22. Sesame-flower-shaped nose.

The various types of marriages, as enunciated by the authors of the Smṛtis, are not mentioned by Vālmīki. Six methods of consecrating a marriage union were, however, in vogue in the Rāmāyaṇa age and these may have acquired set names in the age of the Smṛtis.

The Bālakāṇḍa narrates how the daughters of King Kuśanābha were given without receiving anything from the bridegroom, who was invited and honoured by the bride's father, and the nuptial ceremony was performed in accordance with prescided rites (I. 33). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, an account is given of the marriages of the daughters of King Tṛṇabindu and sage Bharadvāja—which too were also performed in this style. This marriage may well have been a forerunner of the *brāhma-vivāha* of the Smṛti literature.

The second form of marriage is illustrated by the wedding of Sītā. Janaka asked Rāma to wed Sītā as a *saha-dharma-carī* (joint performer of religious rites), and gave her away fully adorned. This form is what later came to be known as *prājāpatya-vivāha*, which consists of the gift of a daughter by her father after he has honoured the bridegroom and addressed the couple with the words: "May both of you perform your religious duties together" (I,. 73. 25-6).

The custom of taking dowry or bride-price (*śulka*) from the bridegroom probably prevailed among the Aryans off the north-west frontiers. The king of Kekaya conferred his daughter Kaikeyī on Daśaratha after exacting from him a promise to confer his kingdom on her offspring (II. 107. 3). Later, this form of marriage came to be termed as *āsura-vivāha*.

Yet another form of marriage was what is known as *gāndharva-vivāha*, which is defined as a union springing from mutual love. Several damsels, smitten with love of Rāvaṇa, are said to have approached him and voluntarily become his spouse (V. 9. 68-9). Śūrpaṇakhā wooed Rāma and begged him to marry her (III. 17. 25). Budha solicited the love of the gloriously beautiful Ilā, and she too out of her own free will accepted his advances and placed herself at his disposal (VII. 89. 4, 6).

Marriage by capture was widely followed by the Rākṣasas who were notorious for their cruel and forcible ways. Having kidnapped Sītā to his capital, Rāvaṇa implored her to become his wife (III. 55. 17). He told her she need not fear that acceptance of his proposal might be unrighteous ; for, their union would be in consonance with the canons of an *ārṣa* marriage (III. 55 35). The commentators explain the word *ārṣa* as "what the sages prescribe as the *rākṣasa-vivāha*." But, there is no warrant for this. It simply meant a form of marriage prevalent from hoary antiquity in semi-civilized tribes.

The libidinous Rākṣasas were also habituated to employ force for sexual union with unwilling maidens. This sort of rape was later designated by the Smṛtikāraś as the *paiśāca-vivāha*, in which a maiden is physically overpowered by the male in order to make her yield to his animal passion. Rāvaṇa's carnal knowledge of Puñjikasthalā (VI. 13. 12) and other Apsarās is an illustration of this.

A study of the above forms of marriage is interesting in so far as they indicate how they reacted on the lot of the bride. In the *brāhma* and *prājāpatya* forms, there was the gift of the girl (*kanyā-dāna*) by the father or guardian to the bridegroom. This meant transfer of the father's right of guardianship and control of the maiden to the husband. In both these forms, the bride figured as an object of gift and not as an active agent. Yet the *prājāpatya* form contained a clause favourable to the bride. Here, the father offered his daughter as a *saha-dharma-carī* of the bridegroom ; in other words, he stipulated with his son-in-law that the latter would associate the wife with himself in sacrifices and works of charity and that he would never marry another wife. The *āsura-vivāha*, under which the husband has to pay a reasonable price for the bride, though not very honourable in itself, implies a recognition by the society that woman has a value and has to be paid for. This price was not necessarily in cash or kind, but in the form of certain stipulations to ensure the bride's happiness. In the *svayaṁvara* system of marriage, the princes, seeking the hand of a maiden, were required to perform some valorous feat. This *vīrya-śulka* or dowry of prowess invested the daughter with considerable social importance. In the *gāndharva-vivāha* or love marriage, the girl's feelings, no doubt, ruled uppermost and there was no gift by the father ; on the contrary, the father's or guardian's authority was set aside by the girl for the time being. The *rākṣasa* and *paiśāca* forms of marriage observed no tradition or decorum and the lot of the girl was pathetic and pitiable inasmuch as both amounted to marriage by capture.

The dowry system, as it is understood now, cannot be said to have been prevalent in the Rāmāyaṇa age. Presents were, no doubt, offered to the bridegroom by the bride's father, but they were purely voluntary. By no means was it a pre-nuptial contract of payment on the part of the bride's father, which form it later assumed and continues to date.

On the occasion of the daughter's marriage, bridal gifts, known as *kanyā-dhana* (or *strī-dhana*), used to be presented as accompaniments to the *kanyā-dāna*. King Janaka, at the nuptials of his beloved daughter Sītā, gave away magnificent gifts consisting of several hundred thousand cows, excellent shawls and crores of white cloths, elephants, horses, chariots and a well-accoutred infantry, 100 maidens, excellent servants and servant-maids, and gold, silver, pearls and corals (I. 74. 3-6). These bridal gifts evidently became the *strī-dhana* for the daughter's married life.

There is no indication of any previous stipulation in the bridal presents offered by Janaka to Rāma which were all unpledged and made gladly and voluntarily after the marriage out of pure affection. On the other hand, there are hints about giving some sort of dowry or *śulka* to the girl or her father in view of the bride's exceptional accomplishments or beauty or the bridegroom's agedness. For winning Sītā's hand, Rāma had to pay *vīrya-śulka* or the dowry of prowess (I. 67. 23). In the case of the aged monarch, Daśaratha, desiring to marry the young princess, Kaikeyī, some consideration—*rājya-śulka*—had to be offered (II. 107. 3).

Coming to the marriage ceremony proper, it is evident that it was an elaborate affair. The nuptial rites (known as *vaivāhikī* or *vaivāhya*, I. 73. 19, 12) were always performed at an auspicious hour. The day of Uttarāphālgunī was considered most auspicious for wedding (I. 72. 13). Parents were conscientious to celebrate marriages in auspicious lunar mansions (*nakṣatras*) and at lucky hours (*muhūrtas*) (I. 71. 24). Astrology played no further part in the marriage ceremony. Considerations like the tallying of horoscopes are absent for the settlement of marriages in the Rāmāyaṇa and are, obviously, later innovations.

A fairly comprehensive idea of the rites and ceremonies observed in marriages can be obtained from a study of the marriage of Rāma and Sītā, described at length in the epic (I. 69-73), which took five days to complete. After Rāma had snapped Śiva's bow and, so, become eligible for the hand of Sītā, King Janaka sent his emissaries to Ayodhyā seeking Daśaratha's approval of the proposal. Obviously, the marriage proposal used to be made by the bride's father to the father of the bridegroom.

On the arrival of Daśaratha and party at Mithilā, they were cordially welcomed by Janaka who made arrangements for their proper reception and comfortable lodging (*sīmānta-pūjana*). Janaka gave vent to his felicity at the matrimonial alliance between the houses of Ayodhyā and Mithilā and personally extended to him a formal request to have the marriage of his sons performed with his daughters the following day with the blessings of eminent sages. Daśaratha heartily accepted the proposal.

The ceremony commenced with Janaka completing, on the first day, his sacrificial and other related preliminary rites for the nuptials of his two daughters. Full details of these rites are not given in the epic. On the second day, Daśaratha, along with his sons and ministers, was conducted by Janaka to his residence and then began the ceremony of *vaṁśāvalī-kathana*, reciting the great genealogies of Rāma and Sītā. After due proposal from Daśaratha, *purohita* Vasiṣṭha extolled the lineage of the Ikṣvākus and ended by soliciting the hands of Janaka's daughters in marriage on behalf of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. The recital of the Videha genealogy was performed by Janaka himself who was of the opinion that, at a daughter's marriage, the genealogy should be exhaustively cited by one born of that line. At the termination of *vaṁśāvalī-kathana*, Viśvāmitra commended the propriety of alliance between the families of Ikṣvāku and Videha, and said that the union of Rāma and Sītā, and of Lakṣmaṇa and Ūrmilā, was indeed worthy in all ways—by virtues of the couples' merits and physical elegance.

Then there took place the *vāgdāna* or betrothal ceremony at the bride's residence in the presence of the priests and relatives of both parties. Janaka repeated three times his solemn vow of conferring Sītā on Rāma and Ūrmilā on Lakṣmaṇa, and requested Daśaratha to perform *godāna* and other rites for the welfare of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Betrothal over, the bridegroom's party returned to their quarters after duly thanking the bride's father. Upon reaching his abode, Daśaratha had the *śrāddha* ceremony performed right ritually. Thus ended the second day of the ceremony.

On the morning of the third day, Daśaratha performed the *godāna* and, to invoke welfare for his sons, severally gave away cows with their calves and gold-plated horns to Brāhmaṇas by the thousands. Besides, the king made presents of various valuables to Brāhmaṇas on behalf of his sons.

On the fourth day was performed the most important rite—*saṁskāra* or the ceremony in essence. The daughters of Janaka, having performed all the auspicious preliminaries, came into the *paṇḍāl* and sat at the foot of the *vedī* or altar. After the completion of all the auspicious ceremonies, at the lucky hour named Vijaya, Rāma and his brothers arrived at the bride's residence gaily-decorated, accompanied by their priests and relations. Cordially received by Janaka, the party entered the sacrificial *paṇḍāl* (*prapā*) where the central rites were to be performed.

After the arrival of both the brides and the bridegrooms in the *paṇḍāl*, Janaka requested Vasiṣṭha, the priest of the bridegroom's party, to perform the necessary rites of marriage proper. Thereupon Vasiṣṭha, assisted by Viśvāmitra and Śatānanda, erected the *vedī* (altar) in accordance with the rules (*yathāvidhi*) in the middle of the *paṇḍāl* and had it decorated all around with scented flowers, vases full of fragrant buds and sprouts, ears of barley, conch-shells, sacrificial spoons, vessels furnished with *arghyas*, and numerous dishes containing paddy and sacrificial *akṣatas*. Decoration of the *vedī* completed, Vasiṣṭha, with due *mantras* and rites, spread over it an awning of uniform *darbhas*. Then he placed the fire on the *vedī* according to prescribed rites and formulas and began to pour oblations into it.

Thereupon King Janaka conducted his daughter Sītā, decked with ornaments, to the side of the fire opposite Rāma, and thus addressed him : "This is my daughter Sītā ; do thou accept her as thy partner in the observance of all duties. Grasp her hand in token of acceptance. She will be of exalted piety, and devoted to her husband, ever following thee like thy shadow" (I. 73. 26-7). Similarly, he addressed the three brothers of Rāma and offered them the hands of Ūrmilā, Māṇḍavī and

Śrutakīrti. The king sprinkled the palms of the grooms with water sanctified by *mantras*.

After Janaka's offer of *kanyā-dāna*, the four Ikṣvaku princes, taking the hands of the four brides in token of acceptance, went thrice round the sacrificial fire, the *vedī*, the king and the high-souled sages, and entered into matrimony with their wives in accordance with the ordinance : the bridegroom with the bride sitting by his right performed *lāja-homa* (offering of fried grain into the fire).

On the fifth day, the day following the marriage proper, the brides departed to their husbands' home. Janaka bade farewell to his daughters with various presents and escorted the party for some distance. The city of Ayodhyā was tastefully decorated for the reception of the royal couples. The brides were welcomed into the palace by the mothers-in-law with auspicious hymns and necessary ceremonies. *Homas* were performed and blessings invoked on the new-weds.

The whole ceremony of marriage, as described above, is suggestive of the psychology underlying the mutual relationship between husband and wife. Under the Aryan ideal of marriage, man and woman become united in accordance with Vedic rites performed before the sacred fire.and, hence, their wedlock is of a sacramental character and not of a contractual nature. And, therefore, irrevocable and indissoluble. Once husband and wife, always (in all births) husband and wife—this is the characteristic Hindu doctrine which leaves no scope for divorce or remarriage. During the ceremony of *kanyā-dāna*, the bride's father, on the one hand, assures the groom that the bride will ever remain devoted to him and, on the other, obtains a promise from the bridegroom that he will not fail to make her his beloved companion in the practice of righteousness (VI. 32. 21) This postulates an unbreakablity into the union. When Rāma, after the battle of Laṅkā, repudiated the allegedly besmirched Sītā, she accused him of breach of the marriage vow (VI. 116. 16). Mutual fidelity till death was, in Vālmīki's opinion as much as in Manu's (IX. 101-3), the highest law for both husband and wife. By calling the wife *dharmapatnī* (III. 34. 15) or *sahacāriṇī* (VI. 32. 20) of the husband, Vālmīki emphasizes the psychological harmony between them since all daily rites and *dhārmika* duties, to be peformed in order to win happiness here and hereafter, have to be undertaken by the couple together.

Husband and wife are bound to each other not only "till death us part" but even beyond—in the world hereafter. "A woman who has been given away as wife by her father to one with due rites of gift pertaining to one's class, touching holy water, shall be his even in her after-life" (II. 29. 18). Sītā had profound faith in the prospect of sharing all blessings and joys in Rāma's company even in after-life (II. 29. 17), even in the jungle, only in separation !

The sublime ideal of marriage notwithstanding, instances of rupture in married life were not unknown, and "fair ones forsaken by their husbands" (II. 66. 24) are employed by Vālmīki as standards of comparison. In a kingless State, it is stressed, wives do not obey their husbands and they are hard put to it to live in such a place (II. 67. 10-11). Kausalyā refers to unchaste women who forsake their husbands during misfortune (II. 39. 21). Instances are also found of wives being discarded for indulging in adultery (Ahalyā), or brazen selfishness (Kaikeyī), or scant concern for the husband's life (Kaikeyī's mother), or alleged infidelity and consequent fear of public scandal (Sītā in the Uttarakāṇḍa).

Polygamy was almost the order of the day among the kings. Most of them—whether Aryan, Vānara or Rākṣasa—possessed large harems. Daśaratha is said to have had 350 wives (II. 34. 13 ; 39. 36), besides the four principal queens. Rāvaṇa married many women and his harem contained a thousand mistresses (III. 55. 17 ;

V. 23. 13). Vālmīki calls his prodigiously large harem, consisting of princesses, daughters of celestials and Rākṣasa girls (V. 9. 68, 6 ; 11. 45-6), a veritable "forest of women" (*strī-vanam*, V. 9. 65). Both Sugrīva (VI. 128. 22) and Vālī (IV. 20. 22) also had large harems. Janaka of Mithilā had evidently more than two wives, as he is stated to have handed over the baby Sītā to his oldest wife for rearing up (II. 118. 33).

Though generally prevalent in the Kṣatriya class, the practice of polygamy seems to have obtained among the Brāhmaṇas also in the age of the Uttarakāṇḍa. The Brāhmaṇa sage Viśravāḥ at first wedded Devavarṇinī, daughter of Bharadvāja, and subsequently Kaikasī, who later became the mother of Rāvaṇa (VII. 9. 12). In the Araṇyakāṇḍa, sage Kaśyapa is mentioned as having married eight women (III. 14. 11). Evidently, plurality of wives was a luxury beyond the means of the poor. It was prevalent largely among the royal as well as well-to-do classes and not among the middle or lower strata of society.

An Aryan king of those days used to have at least four principal wives. The first was known as *mahiṣī*, the second as *parivtṛtti*, the third as *vāvātā* and the fourth as *pālākalī* (*aparā*, I. 14. 35). Of these, the *mahiṣī* was the formally consecrated chief queen, the *parivṛtti* was the neglected or discarded wife of the king and the *vāvātā* was in personal favour with the prince. Some commentators distinguish this classification on a caste basis : *mahiṣī* being the Kṣatriyā, *parivṛtti* the Vaiśyā and *vāvātā* the Śūdrā queen of the king. The *pālākalī* (or low-born) wife of the king is an indication that it was a political marriage; and daughters of higher court officials also were customarily admitted into the harem.[1] Applying this classification in Daśaratha's case, Kausalyā may be recognized as the *mahiṣī*, Sumitrā as the *parivṛtti* and Kaikeyī, who was the king's favourite, as the *vāvātā* queen. The Rāmāyaṇa does not mention the name of the *pālākalī* wife of Daśaratha and merely refers to her as *aparā*. These designations are essentially relative and presuppose a regular harem establishment (whose inmates experienced frequent rise and fall in prestige at court).[2]

With a polygamous husband, it was but natural that one wife should be be in more favour than the rest (through some superior accomplishment or beauty) commanding the special regard of her husband. Kaikeyī was the favourite queen of Daśaratha (II. 9. 24), and the king spent most of his time in her palace (II. 72. 12). Hailing from the frontier regions, she possessed charm and grace in a greater measure than the other (senior) queens, and, being the youthful beloved of the old monarch (II. 10. 23), almost monopolized his love. "Thou hast always been the darling of thy husband," said Mantharā to Kaikeyī, "and for thy sake the king would enter into blazing fire. He would never anger thee or brook to meet thy wrathful look, and to gratify thy desire the king would gladly die. He can never set aside thy word" (II. 9. 24-6). Naturally the wife, who succeeded in appropriating the king to herself, became puffed with pride and employed her power in tormenting and harassing her rival queens (II. 53. 15). The other queens of the harem had to entreat her favours.

As a corollary of the husband's partiality for his favoured wife, the lot of the other neglected wives was often poignant. So it was in the case of Kausalyā. In spite of her being the foremost of Daśaratha's consorts, she was relegated to an inferior position as compared to Kaikeyī. Ordinarily, the neglected wife patiently bore her grief and, except for occasional ventilation of her anger, never thought of openly venting her displeasure.

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : *Some Aspects of the Earliest Social History of India*, p. 87.

[2] Op. cit.

Jealousy between co-wives was quite common. This was often found to spring from the rival wife's children. The rivalry between Kaikeyī and Kausalyā reached its climax when the question arose of the installation of the latter's son to regency. Mantharā in her expostulation to Kaikeyī described the prosperity of a co-wife's son to be as ominous as the approach of death (II. 8. 4).

It must have been quite taxing for the polygamous husband to give no cause for quarrel among his wives. The periodical displeasure of one of the queens and her pacification by the husband with supplications and importunities must have been a feature of common occurrence. The Rāmāyaṇa refers to angered wives returning to their husbands after due propitiation (V. 14. 29-31). A sulking chamber or *krodhāgāra* was maintained in royal palaces where a displeased wife repaired when in anger. There she lay clad in soiled garments on bare floor and, when her lord would come to coax and cajole her, she spoke not a word to him, kept weeping in overwhelming anguish and would not be calmed until given his word of honour to fulfil her wish (II. 9. 22-8).

Apart from this, life in the harem was luxurious. The queens lived a gilded existence each in a separate palace with a retinue and personal property or *strī-dhana* (II. 31. 22). The soft luxury, the pomp and splendour of the palaces, the imposing army of attendants and hangers-on, expensive food, bestowal of gifts on Brāhmaṇas and supplicants (and their feeding) characterized the usual activities in a royal harem of the time (II. 10. 12-6 ; 20. 9-16). The sensuous life of the *zenānā* is graphically depicted in Vālmīki in a reference to Rāvaṇa's *antaḥpura* (V. 9-10).

The system of polygamy was one of the weak spots of Aryan culture, giving rise to easy virtue among court officials, resulting in calamitous repercussions on the affairs of the kingdom and thus undermining the virility of political life. The criss-cross of personal rivalries and antagonism, which was a direct outcome of the plurality of wives, was in its turn a frequent cause of family feuds, squabbles of jealousy, succession troubles, court intrigues and plots, and even attempts at assassination.[1]

The episode of the succession trouble in Daśaratha's family was a corollary of the polygamous life of the Ikṣvākus. An Ikṣvāku king, by marrying princesses from different kingdoms with different traditions, congregated into his harem heterogeneous elements, inviting an inevitable clash of interests and objectives. The kings of Kekaya were monogamists, and Kaikeyī, coming from a family with traditions different from those of the Ikṣvākus,[2] created trouble by seeking to appropriate the king to herself and ignore, if not alienate, his other wives and their children. The different queens had gathered round themselves a band of their own favourites, relatives and hangers-on to prop up their interests. In Ayodhyā, there existed distinct parties of henchmen, each upholding the cause of Daśaratha, Kausalyā and Sumitrā, and Kaikeyī respectively (II. 12. 106 ; 4. 39 ; 8. 34 —each vigilantly guarding the interests of its patron and thereby infecting the corroding virus of harem-cum-power potitics into the texture of national life. The harem intrigues in Daśaratha's palace were directly instrumental in bringing about a political, social and economic crisis throughout the length and breadth of Kosala, not to speak of the hastened end of the ruling monarch.

In such a polygamous society, the commendable ideal of monogamy or *ekapatnīvrata* was not entirely lost sight of, and it elicits highest praise from

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[1] Rāma apprehended that Kaikeyī might administer poison to his mother (II. 53. 18).

[2] This is clearly hinted in the epic where Kaikeyī and her kin are regarded as coming of a barbarian, ignoble race by the Kosalan people (II. 35).

Vālmīki. The blind ascetic, who cursed Daśaratha for having killed his innocent son, could think of no other higher reward for his son's filial services than blessing him to attain to regions obtained by people observing the *ekapatnīvrata* (II. 64. 43-4). It is, however, Rāma who has always been looked upon as the most notable exemplar of the ideal of monogamy.

At two places in the Rāmāyaṇa, one is led to conjecture the existence of more than one wife for Rāma. Mantharā, during her indoctrination of Kaikeyī, refers to the excellent wives (*paramāḥ striyaḥ*) of Rāma beaming with joy at his accession to the throne (II. 8. 12). But, up to the proposed coronation of Rāma, the poet gives no hint of Rāma having wedded any wife other than Sītā. Sītā also, at Rāma's departure to the forest, calls herself a *kaumārī* (II. 30. 8), *i.e.*, the wife of one who has no other wife. Mantharā's remarks are, thus, not corroborated. She had probably expected Rāma to marry several women after assuming regency, even as his father had done. But Rāma was no "slave to the times" (II. 1. 31) and never approved of polygamy, the aristocratic fashion of the day. Or, it is better to interpret, as commentators suggest, *paramāḥ striyaḥ* as the revered ladies of Rāma's house, *e.g.*, Sumitrā and Kausalyā, or his female attendants, or the lady friends of Sītā (for Janaka gave many hand-maidens to accompany Sītā).

Sītā, when she is about to put an end to her life at Laṅkā, broods how Rāma would, in her absence, enjoy in the company of large-eyed damsels after the completion of his vow (V. 28. 14). Here "enjoyment" need not necessarily imply conjugal pleasure ; it might only refer to entertainment by women dancing and singing which was a common practice in that age. However, as events turned out, Sītā does not die and Rāma, after his return to Ayodhyā, enjoys blessings of wedded life with Sītā alone.

As depicted in the Uttarakāṇḍa, even after the passing away of Sītā, Rāma did not take a second wife (VII. 99. 7), although the custom of the age permitted of that. Since the presence of the wife was absolutely necessary during the Aśvamedha and other sacrifices, Rāma invariably substituted a golden image of Sītā in her place (VII. 99. 7), but he never thought of or sought a second wife. He, thus, really became a pioneer of a new and reformed way of life for the princes.

Polyandry, too, is in evidence in the Rāmāyaṇa age, particularly among the non-Aryan tribes of South India. In Kiṣkindhā, the Vānara brothers, Vālī and Sugrīva, had Tārā and Rumā as their common wives, though they quarrelled about it and excluded each other alternately. That Rāma punished Vālī for his illicit connection with Rumā shows that polyandry was abhorred by the Aryans.

While on the subject of polyandry, reference must be made to the conjecture put forward by some scholars to adduce evidence from the Rāmāyaṇa to the effect that in the original tradition Sītā was the common wife of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.[1] This, it is argued, is confirmed by the episode of Lakṣmaṇa refusing to go to assist Rāma (when his cries of distress are heard), and Sītā charging him and Bharata with a design to appropriate her after getting rid of Rāma ; Rāma's suggestion after the battle of Laṅkā that Sītā might live with Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata or Śatrughna ; and finally Virādha's surmise that Sītā was the common wife of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (III. 45. 24 ; 2. 11 ; VI. 115. 22). But it will be seen that this evidence is too meagre and inconclusive to admit of any polyandry on the part of Sītā whose reputation as the paragon of Indian wifehood rests entirely on her characterization as an ideal *pativratā*. The incident of Sītā charging Lakṣmaṇa with the design of appropriating her was merely an exhibition of her temper and lack of control (*strītvāt*) as

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : op. cit., p. 149.

Lakṣmaṇa himself realizes, and the charge is immediately followed by an emphatic assertion of her exclusive devotion to the lotus-eyed Rāma (III. 45. 32-3, 25-6). Rāma's suggestion to Sītā to live with Lakṣmaṇa, etc., is also made at a time when, having misgivings about the chastity of his wife, he decides to forsake her ... and is, as the commentators suggest, quite in keeping with the social tradition that, for a separated wife, the only proper asylum is the house of her husband's relatives or friends. Virādha's surmise, it is clear, was absolutely baseless. He was merely expressing his abhorrence of polyandry. Lakṣmaṇa's profound respect for, and courteous conduct towards, Sītā (IV. 6. 22-3) throughout the epic should completely dispel all doubt about his being anything other than a devoted brother-in-law to her. Sītā puts out the fire on Hanumān's tail by the power of her nobility of one-wifehood (*ekapatnītva*, V. 53. 26), and at another place laments over the ineffectiveness of her *pativratātva* (single-minded attachment to her one-and-only-one husband) because of her forlorn captivity in Laṅkā (V. 28. 12). Indeed, the epic is replete with incontrovertible proofs of Sītā's single-minded and undying love for Rāma alone (V. 65. 3 ; II. 27. 23).

One more aspect of marriage that existed in ancient India may be referred to here. Kausalyā was a princess of Kosala and Daśaratha the king of Kosala, and it has been suggested in some quarters that Daśaratha contracted a sister-marriage with Kausalyā who could only have been a sister or first cousin (paternal uncle's daughter) to him. It is further contended that Kausalyā is not the proper name of Daśaratha's senior queen and that the word in the genealogies always means a daughter and never wife of a Kosala king.[1] But, this conclusion is devoid of any historical truth and only marks an ingenious attempt of some Buddhists to disparage Aryan personages. Actually, the Rāmāyaṇa (VII. 107. 7) makes mention of two Kosalas, North Kosala (or Oudh) and South Kosala (or modern Chattisgarh), and two separate kings ruled over them. The solar dynasty founded by King Ikṣvāku with Ayodhyā as its capital ruled over the former. Daśaratha invited one Bhānumān, who is stated to be the king of Kosala, to attend his Aśvamedha sacrifice. This Bhānumān was perhaps the lord of Dakṣina Kosala or Mahākosala and the father of Kausalyā (I. 13. 26). This sufficiently removes any misconception regarding Kausalyā's relationship with Daśaratha.

To the same tendency of disparagement by the Buddhists is attributable the view that Rāma was the brother and husband of Sītā. If Sītā had been the sister of Rāma, she would not have gone to the forest along with Rāma, nor is it possible that a Kṣatriya lived unmarried for fourteen years with a sister whom he was at liberty to marry.[2] In any case, Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa does not bear the slightest hint to show that Rāma was both a brother as well as a husband to Sītā.

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : op. cit., p. 125.
[2] C V. Vaidya : *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 62.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE

The Rāmāyaṇa provides numerous lovely pictures of the delights of love and romance—of man's fondness for handsome women and woman's passion for the joys of dalliance. Tārā paints in glowing terms the all-conquering nature of *kāma* (or Cupid) to Lakṣmaṇa. All shyness and decorum, she says, is taken away by the proximity of one's beloved. *Kāma* is passion sex urge hard to suppress, harder to eradicate. The ascetic morality of life-long abstinence is a virtue hardly practicable even for seasoned sages—not to speak of the average man. There was never one ascetic without the erotic spark latent in him (IV. 33. 54-6).

Rāma recognizes the strong hold of *kāma* on human beings. Musing upon Daśaratha's woe and mental confusion, he admits *kāma* to be of greater might than *dharma* and *artha* (II. 53. 9). Nay, in his own case, Rāma wonders at the topsy-turvy nature of *kāma—kāma* that surges in his mind at the memory of his beloved (though abducted and difficult of access, IV. 1. 68).

Rāvana was repeatedly prompted by his cannibal instinct to make short work of Sītā, wife of his deadly foe Rāma, but his amour for Sītā—the passion aroused in him on beholding her dainty and tender feet with roseate soles and coppery nails—turned his wrath into affection and tenderness (VI. 12. 15 ; V. 22. 4-5).

The description of Rāvaṇa's *antaḥpura* presents a luscious scene of passionate love-making. The poet speaks of wives asleep beside their husbands ; damsels, displaying side-glances and other tokens of dalliance, engaged in drinking with their lovers ; glamorous wenches affected simultaneously with bashfulness and bliss on being embraced by their paramours (like birds with their mates) ; ladies in stately halls cosily lying in the laps of their lovers—married women, beloved of their lords and intent on virtue, coming under the influence of Cupid (V. 5. 9, 17-9).

If women, so, have such a healthy and natural joy in the delights of love, how much more so men. The delight in woman and love for her have always been a part of man's life. Love was as much a ruling passion of the epic heroes as war itself ; and they readily plunged precipitately into both. The frequently seen warrior's ideal of blissful life is to enjoy the love of myriads of lovely women in the bloom of youth (V. 28. 14). The epic often alludes to the belief that a doughty man is rewarded in the world beyond with boundless joys of love and hosts of heavenly nymphs. The earthly warrior, fallen in battle, is welcomed by Apsarās (*houris*) of paradise. Tārā, while bewailing her slain husband, speaks of how he would tempt the minds of Apsarās, expert in erotics and proud of their youth and beauty (IV. 20. 13 ; 24. 34).

According to the canons of *dāmpatya* (conjugal life), it is man who is expected to take the lead in honouring wife with endearing epithets and fond caresses. The aged king Daśaratha's fondness for his youngest and prettiest queen, Kaikeyī, is very effectively portrayed by the poet. On the day previous to Rāma's proposed coronation, when he entered Kaikeyī's palatial mansion and did not find his beloved on the excellent couch, the king, desirous as he was for *rati* (amorous sport), was grieved and made anxious enquiries : for, never before had that lady missed the hour of meeting her lord and never, till then, had the king entered an empty room. Anxious and sorrow-stricken, the king is informed by the woman door-keeper that the gracious lady is out of her wits and is in her sulking chamber. This agitates him terribly. He hastens to the chamber of wrath where he beholds his young spouse, dearer to him than life, lying on the ground in a most piteous posture. Like some wild elephant, trying to sooth his consort, as she lies struck by the hunter's venomed dart, does the king with a disturbed heart strive with fond caresses to soothe the distress of his darling queen. The words which he addresses to her are remarkable not only for the choicest epithets of endearment but also for the deep fondness a man can cherish and express for his pet wife (II. 10. 17-40).

Vālmīki has not attempted to minimize the role of sex impulse in love between man and woman. He furnishes allusions to newly wedded pairs proceeding to drink deep at the fountain of conjugal love in the privacy of their home (I. 77. 13 ; VII. 5. 33-4 ; 12. 27). The bashfulness of the young bride full of love is something easily conjured up by the poet when he compares the rivers in autumn, losing their abundance of water and showing their sandy banks, to women exposing their buttocks hesitatingly bashful in their first union with their lovers (IV. 30. 58). We are also furnished with half-sensuous and half-romantic pictures of a maiden in love whose eyes open wide and who lets her garment slip through the joy of being touched by her lover, of a woman slipping off from the lap of her lover, and of damsels with girdles on their hips moving in a slow gait early in the morning weary after the pleasures of love (IV. 30. 45, 54 ; V. 14. 29). Further, we are told about youthful beauties subjugated in amorous encounter, their hair dishevelled, their paste worn off, their lips with sparkling teeth sucked of their moisture, and their person torn with nails and teeth (V. 14. 18). Witness the indelible impress of Sītā's physical charm on love-lorn Rāma's mind : "When shall I tilt lightly upwards her lotus-like face, lit by its lovely teeth, and drink as the sick drink (of a cup of life) ? When will the quivering breasts of the laughing one, pressing against each other, swelling like unto the wine-palm fruit, clasp me ? When at last will Sītā twine herself round my neck, filled with longing, and shed tears of joy ?" (VI. 5. 13-20). Another striking instance of the powerful sex appeal of woman is found when Rāvaṇa, being smitten with the dart of love at Rambhā's sight, takes her by the hand and pays a most unreserved tribute to the irresistible charm of her loveliness and glory (VII. 26. 21-4).

It is universally admitted that the full enjoyment of love, of the world of sense, is but a natural right for men and women. All other means of winning over the reticent Sītā proved unavailing, Rāvaṇa was advised by Mahāpārśva to adopt the tactics of the cock—reaping pleasure even from a forced union with an unwilling hen (VI. 13. 4). For, it is argued, why should a man not try every possible means to win the love of one whom he desires ? "A man who, entering the forest abounding with deer and ferocious animals, does not drink honey, makes a fool of himself" (VI. 13. 2). It follows that in a world beset with woes and worries : why should one deny oneself love, and joys of love—the highest of all earthly blessings ?

The sexual union of man with woman was deemed quite a natural and normal phenomenon and any incidence of an imposed or unnatural celibacy was looked upon as abnormal and undesirable. The prudery or monkish austerity of sage Vibhāṇḍaka had excluded women altogether from his hermitage, unlike the majority of other hermitages mentioned in the epic, and his son Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's celibacy was jealously guarded under the vigil of an austere father. This was popularly regarded as the cause of drought and infertility in the realm of Romapāda where the hermitage was situated.[1] The task of making a breach in this celibate monastic community was undertaken by the State in the light of a fertility rite. The wily raids of accomplished light-skirts from the Aṅga court led to the easy fall of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and, subsequently, to the marriage of the celibate youth to the Aṅga princess, Śāntā. It was regarded that the fertilization of the sexual impulse, innate but hitherto unnaturally curbed in the hermit youth, resulted in the fertility of the State's soil itself (I. 10).

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : *Educational Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p. 117.

Disturbance of the enjoyment of sex was felt as particularly inhuman. Pārvatī, united to her husband, cursed the gods for their intrusion upon her privacy (I. 66. 21) ; Vālmīki pronounced a vehement imprecation on the fowler who shot at the pair of *krauñca* birds just in the joys of pairing (I. 2. 15).

Public gardens and pleasure-groves were favourite haunts of lovers (though later Smṛtis forbid the delights of love in a park, garden or forest). In the evenings, men and women sought their pleasure and shared the joys of love in the shelter of trees and bushes (II. 71. 22, 25). In swift carriages lovers with their beloveds drove out, modish and dashing, to the tangled forest (II. 67. 19). Charming sites like Citrakūṭa were the pleasure-haunts of amorous people (II. 94. 24). Rāma and Sītā had enough of sport and enjoyment in picturesque surroundings during their forest rambles (II. 94. 18). Both being of strong sense and feeling, each loved the other as true lovers do and made the best of their married life. "Especially in the wilderness, Sītā, being no longer restricted by the circumstances of city and court life, revelled like a child of nature ; no more oppressed by grave saws about wifely duties, and getting her husband all to herself, plunges into a perpetual honeymoon...After her rescue from captivity and restoration to her husband she, for a time reverted to her bridal life as it were, content to be a beloved wife and a bounteous queen-consort, with no other interests except the joys of youth, love and poetry."[1]

Pictures of the fondest, tenderest and yet most passionate, love for the wife or woman are set before us. Man's all-predominant love for his chosen one is most beautifully set forth in Rāma's love-plaints for Sītā abducted by Rāvaṇa. Life has no meaning for him if he does not see that woman with the soft-lashed eyes, lovely hair and gentle speech. If he could but dwell together with her in the woods and take joy with her on their delightful grassy floors, he would not envy the king of the gods, nor Ayodhyā, nor be vexed any more with care nor hanker after other longings...Like a demented person he goes on gazing vacantly ; the river Godāvarī gives no answer to the anguished questioner ; the mountains tell him not. Sugrīva brings him the upper garment and ornaments of Sītā. Weeping aloud he falls to the ground and presses to his heart those ornaments that have felt the glow of her body. His thoughts henceforth are only of his beloved—particularly when he sees the moon rise : tears swell up and sleep comes not to his eyes. He eats but at every fifth meal ; flies and gnats and other vermin he does not keep away from himself, he does not even notice them for his soul is not there (it is off with Sītā). "Sītā, Sītā !" is the only expression on his lips.[2]

Nature with its soft beauties and merry life often acts as a kindler of love in the hearts of men : the green of plants and the splendour of flowers, bird-song, the humming of bees, the gestures of amour among the harmless creatures of the woods, and all the rest. Spring with all its silent expression of bursting life—with her moving messenger, the soft-caressing breeze—is the common arousing friend of fire as well as *kāma*. Rāma, already tortured by agonies of soul in his grief for the kidnapped princess of Videha, is almost moved to distraction at the sight of the flower-crowned creepers clasping flower-laden trees, and of the petals of lotus-cups appearing like the flower-cups of Sītā's eyes. The innocuous little love sports of the dumb dwellers of the forest act as further kindlers in the love-lorn. The water-cock's cry of love's delight; the reverberating sound of the cuckoo; the love-racked peahen dancing on a mountain-top to her dancing mate,...the peacock hastening with longing to his darling spreading his shining wings; the he-gazelles roving with their mates this way and that on the many-coloured mountain tops—all these gnaw and rend the soul of Rāma, setting the passion of his love afire.[1]

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : op. cit., pp. 66, 73.

[2] See IV. 1. 30-1, 95-6 ; III. 60-7 ; IV. 6. 17-8 ; 27. 31-2 ; V. 36. 41-2 ; 36. 44.

Beauty, gaily dressed and exquisitely adorned, is often painted in the epic as an infallible exciter of passion. Woman's appearance becomes still more captivating when she has sipped of a heady drink. Such pretty, drunken women are often set forth by the poet by way of comparison (IV. 1. 85). Hanumān witnessed in Rāvaṇa's harem unabashed participation of women in the joys of love and drink. Lovers often urged women to drink, as the tremulous and glistening eyes of drunken women (*mada-vihvalākṣī*) looked ineffably beautiful and indicative of passion (fig. 23). The epic often describes the amorous effects of intoxication on women. Rāvaṇa offered the recalcitrant Sītā inebriating drink to quaff (V. 20. 35) in the fond hope of her reacting favourably to his advances. Tārā, widow of Vālī, is set forth as a pattern of woman under drink (IV. 33. 38-40).

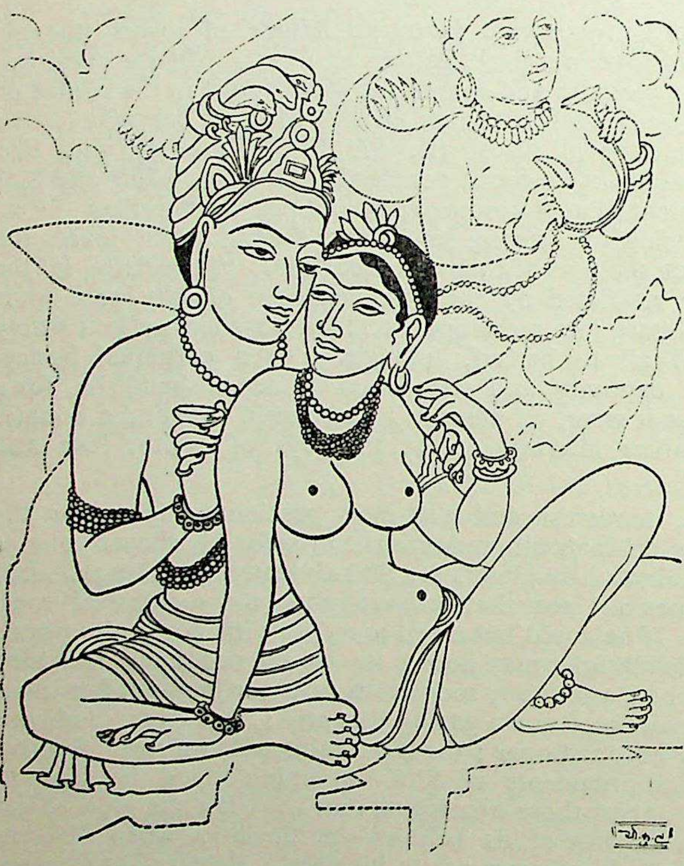

Fig. 23. *Madhu-pāna* (wine-drinking) from Ajaṇṭā, Gupta-Vākāṭaka, fifth century A.D. (Hyderabad, Deccan).

The Rākṣasas appear to be particularly gay and jovial in temperament as they allow themselves unrestricted enjoyment of free love and unbridled romance. Rāvaṇa, in spite of his coxcombry (III. 55. 14-31; V. 20. 17-20), does indeed show a certain romanticism in his passionate desire for Sītā for, as pointed out by his junior queen Dhānyamālinī, it meant wooing an ordinary mortal woman and doomed to ill-luck (V. 22. 40-2).

Even holy men are depicted as hosts presiding over free tables of love in the most magnificent style. Sage Bharadvāja by his miraculous powers entertained Bharata's army in a most romantic fashion. From out of Indra's paradise he called down a whole host of Apsarās, and from other heavens still more divine women. Even the creepers in the forest the Yogī turned into graceful women. Each warrior was entertained by seven or eight of these charming damsels of ravishing womanhood, who gave him their services for his bath, and offered him heady drinks, spirits and spiced liquor (*maireya*) whereof there were whole ponds and rivers, and the flower-cups of their divine bodies (to say nothing of the heaps of rare meats and other choice foods and carnal pleasures). No wonder that the soldiery danced and laughed, and sang to this air :

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[1] See IV. 1. 10, 22, 32, 53, 9, 71, 28-9, 38-40, 101.

"This is heaven ! Hail to thee,
O Bharata ! Here we stay !"[1]

The epic represents even the immortals, the gods, as ardent relishers of stolen romance. A veritable Don Juan from heaven is Indra who, in spite of the faithful Śacī, and in spite of a whole host of heavenly hetaera (V. 24. 10 ; IV. 29. 5), is drawn to the women of the earth. He is often found lying in wait for beautiful women and changes himself into every kind of shape to enjoy them. Just as Zeus once came to Amphitryon's wife in the guise of her husband, so does Indra come to Ahalyā simulating Gautama. Ahalyā recognizes the ruler of the gods with all his disguise, but gladly welcomes the chance it brought her for a more voluptuous entertainment of bed. It is said that Indra was the first to initiate this practice of love-making with others' wives into the world and that, after he had set the bad example, it spread among the rest of mankind (I. 48. 19 ; VII. 30. 33).

To Vālmīki all romantic associations were often symbolized by the association of a male and a female elephant, and he has used this for comparison on several occasions in the epic. Rāvaṇa, surrounded by his wives, looked like a male elephant in the midst of female ones in a forest (V. 11. 12). On Daśaratha's death, his wives screamed like a herd of female elephants in a forest whose leader has gone astray (II. 65. 20). Sītā separated from Rāma was like a female elephant separated from her mate (V. 26. 21). In his attempts to cajole Sītā, Rāvaṇa instructed the Rākṣasīs to "bring Sītā round to my way of thinking, as one tames a young wild female-elephant" (III. 56. 31). At times, the poet has also employed the cow and the bull as symbols of romantic union. This idea is put forth when the poet describes Bharata's entry into the city of Ayodhyā which looked like a cow deserted by her bull (II. 114. 9). Again, Rāvaṇa is depicted amidst his wives as a bull among cows (V. 11. 11). The association of lightning and cloud has also typified the union of man and woman. The wives of Rāvaṇa follow him just as flashes of lightning follow the clouds (V. 18. 15).

A more sober view of love is presented in Vālmīki's delineation of love's ideal. As a matter of fact, the main theme of the Rāmāyaṇa is the conjugal love of Rāma and Sītā, an ideal couple for all times, and many are the images which Vālmīki employs to bring out its deep, noble and eternal character. Their love after marriage was fostered by mutual consideration and constant association, by a spiritual feeling that they were bound for ever in weal or woe, and by the husband's kind and considerate treatment of the maiden who had left her parental home for the strange unknown home of her husband. Their lives, accordingly, were redolent of the highest ideals of marriage and conjugal fidelity and both lived up to love's ideal at its noblest. Instances of other happy marriages are also available in the Rāmāyaṇa. The lamentations of Tārā and Mandodarī bear witness to the intensity of love they bore for their husbands.

In the case of Brāhmaṇa couples the love element, though not absent, played only a subdued part. Married life was looked upon as just a round of duties. The wife's life was spent in rendering personal services to her husband, in feeding the sacrificial fire and in co-operating with him in all fasts and ceremonies. For the wife of the hermit marriage was a vocation, a sacrament, almost a nun-like devotion, and its principal purpose was the acquisition of merit by the performance of religious duties.

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[1] J. J. Meyer : *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, vol. ii, p. 68 ; see Rāmāyaṇa II. 91.

Love is deepest and grows most in a like couple, as in the case of Rāma and Sītā : "By her excellent qualities and her lovely form, the love between them increased and her husband came to exercise a double influence on her heart—so much so that each heart completely read the inmost sentiments of the other" (I. 77. 26-8). Mutual love is the true foundation as well as the true goal of marriage. To be truly relished, it should be reciprocal with the couple's attachment entirely centred in each other (IV. 1. 52). Kind and considerate treatment by the husband arouses sentiments of love and respect on the part of the wife. Sītā loved and adored her husband, and was in turn loved and treated with great consideration by Rāma. Lop-sided love is strongly disapproved by Vālmīki. Dhānyamālinī, in entreating Rāvaṇa not to harbour love for the unwilling Sītā, tells him that if a man desires a woman who loves him not, then his body grows in torment (V. 22. 42). Rāvaṇa, therefore, desists from touching Sītā because of her coldness (V. 20. 6).

Proximity is a natural spring of love : "Love goes to him who is seen ; there is no leaning towards him who is not seen" (V. 26. 39). For the woman particularly, this is true ; for, Vālmīki says, like a creeper, she twines round the nearest tree (IV. 1. 9 ; III. 52. 7). Then, love does not at all go for the worthiest object, as Rāvaṇa would say. For such a paragon of womanhood like Sītā to remain attached to the resourceless forester Rāma, ignorant of diplomacy, clad in bark-garment, deprived of glory, given to vows and reposing on bare earth, appeared to be nothing short of foolhardiness to the enamoured king of Laṅkā ! (V. 22. 31 ; 20. 25-6 ; III. 55. 21 ; 48. 13-4). Daśaratha thus repents for his misplaced love for Kaikeyī : "My heart is grieved for the love and care I have bestowed on thee, just as a sick person repents the dainty meals and condiments taken by him...I am sorry I accepted thee, a wild traitress, as good and true, and am deceived as one who in one's thirst has drunk of the good-looking liquor mixed with poison...I sported with thee not knowing thee to be death itself and dallied with thee in private just like a child with a venomous snake" (II. 12. 70-1, 76, 81).

Consummation of marriage lay in the love of the married couple, culminating in the procreation of progeny (*rati-putra-phalā dārāḥ*). That marriage is a sacred trust to ensure the continuance of the race was recognized by all those who chose to lead the householder's mode of life. Rāma enquires of Bharata at Citrakūṭa whether his wife is *saphalā*, *i.e.*, blest with love and offspring (III. 100. 72). The birth of children was looked upon as *the* most coveted blessing. It was deemed a great misfortune for a man to die without obtaining a wife worthy of him or without begetting sons from her (II. 75. 36).

Although the Rāmāyaṇa recognizes the importance and far-reaching power of sexuality, it incessantly insists on the ethical view of sexual relations (*dharma-rati*, II. 75. 55). The word *saha-dharma-carī* for the wife indicates that the purpose of a wedding is not mere enjoyment (*bhoga*) but a pure, righteous and holy life (*dharma*). The rites marking a marriage ceremony show that mating is a serious duty devoid of all profligacy or lust. The art of love, in India, does not pander to the taste of the profligate. Rules[1] for mating and copulation are casually set forth in the epic to control sex life, wherein sexual relations are considered lawful only under certain conditions of body and mind and the whole being of both the parties concerned, while all other sexual affairs are classified as *vyabhicāra* or unlawful, unbecoming human beings.[2] A man was not to copulate with the wife of his preceptor (II. 63. 30), or with a daughter born from his own loins, or his sister, or with the wife of a (younger or elder) brother (IV. 18. 22-3, 55. 3). A man was to cohabit with his wedded wife only during the *ṛtukālas* or the sixteen nights after menstruation prescribed by scriptures (I. 48. 18). Even during these days, the couple was enjoined to mate in the interest of, and with a view to, reproduction. Cohabitation was to be avoided during twilights and during the wife's menstrual period (VII. 9. 22-4 ; 86. 15). A householder, who thus regulated his connubial relations, was regarded as good as a *brahmacārī*, though in a restricted sense (I. 9. 5).

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[1] II. 63. 30 ; 75. 45 ; IV. 18. 22-3 ; 55. 3 ; VII. 9. 22-4 ; 86. 15, etc.

[2] P. H. Valavalker : *Hindu Social Institutions*, p. 199.

Love must be enjoyed in moderation, and with discretion. It is insisted that only the evening and not the morning or day-time should be given to woman and love (II. 100. 63). Excess, as well as absence, of love is deprecated ; hence one should always resort to the sane middle course (IV. 22. 23). The Rāmāyaṇa does not approve of a too violent love for one's wife. Sugrīva urges Rāma to have done with his sorrow and despair : "I too have known the great misfortune of a wife being carried away, but I do not thus mourn nor lose my staunchness although I am but a poor ape. How much the less shouldst thou do so that art highminded, well-schooled and of a firm character ?" (IV. 7. 6-7). It is clearly hinted in the example of Daśaratha that excessive doting on wife leads to an impairment of the intellect. The king is described as old, uxorious and, therefore, of perverted judgment (II. 21. 2-3). Even Rāma flatly dubs his father as "a henpecked man, a captive in passion's chains, languishing under the burden of love, who merely to gratify a woman's caprice exiled his dutiful son to the wilderness" (II. 53. 8,10, 23 ; 31. 12). The senile infatuation of Daśaratha was well known to, and condemned by, his subjects (II. 12. 83).

Vālmīki has everywhere lent unmitigated support to married love only and never countenanced unbridled or extra-marital romance. He has always insisted on *sva-dāra-niratatva* (making love only to one's own wife) (III. 9. 6 ; 38. 31). According to him, love and wedlock are inseparably united, synonymous. Sītā felicitated Rāma on his always turning attention to his own wife, and never to the wives of others (III. 9. 5-6). Vicious-minded men, of undisciplined senses and not satisfied with their wives, are brought to misery by others' wives (V. 21. 8). Making love to a married woman was regarded as reprehensible and against tradition and social well-being (V. 21 9, 17). Sītā urged Rāvaṇa to take back his mind from her and direct it towards his own wives, warning him that she was lawfully wedded to Rāma and hence unfit for being espoused by another (V. 21. 3-4, 6-7, 16).

Vālmīki has always pleaded for sexual self-control, for the curbing of one's animal passions. A man with unrestrained senses is foredoomed to destruction (III. 48. 22). Chastity is highly valued both in men and women. The king is enjoined to bring about the destruction of the libidinous. Sexual offenders, men or women, are to be severely punished, as instanced by the disfiguration of Śurpaṇakhā and Ayomukhī, the cursing of Ahalyā, Indra and Daṇḍa, and the destruction of Vālī and Rāvaṇa.

Which of the three *puruṣārthas* or ends of life—*dharma, artha* and *kāma*—is the highest ? The epic answers : A hectic or hedonistic pursuit of *kāma* to the detriment of the other two is bound to prove disastrous in the end (II. 100. 62). To quote Rāma himself : "He who renounces *dharma* and *artha* and follows the path of *kāma* speedily gets into trouble like Daśaratha" (II. 53. 13). Hence, the epic lays down that a worldly-wise man should pursue the three *puruṣārthas* of life in due proportion each at its proper time (VI. 63. 9 ; IV. 38. 20-3).

CHAPTER IX

WOMAN IN HOME

The position accorded to women in any society has rightly been regarded as a true index of the state of its civilization. For a fair evaluation of the status of women in the Rāmāyaṇa age, there is abundant material in the epic. Like many other great epics and dramas, interest in the Rāmāyaṇa is often centred on its women characters. Vālmīki commences his epic with the express declaration that the entire poem is but the episode of Sītā—the great exemplar of Indian womanhood (I. 4. 7 ; 1. 27). As the epic proceeds, the good and evil traits of a galaxy of women reveal before the reader a kaleidoscopic vista of their greatness and goodness as well as their foibles and frailties. All but one of the five ideal women—Ahalyā, Tārā, Sītā, Mandodarī and Draupadī—worthy of daily remembrance by every Hindu girl—are portrayed in the Rāmāyaṇa, Draupadī alone being from the *Mahābhārata.* The depiction of women in the Rāmāyaṇa is so graphic that it tends to turn the epic into a story of woman rather than of man. It has most aptly been described as a *strī-prasaṅga* (woman's episode) as contrasted with the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata* which are characterized as *dyūta-* and *cora-prasaṅgas* respectively (gambling and stealing episodes).[1]

In the Rāmāyaṇa, the position of a woman can be studied from many angles. The three important aspects of a woman's life and character being her maidenhood, wifehood and motherhood, it would be interesting to study the question of her place in the society from these specific points of view.

THE MAIDEN

At several places in the Uttarakāṇḍa are depicted the parents' anxiety at the advancing age of their growing daughter.[2] In the genuine Rāmāyaṇa, on the other hand, such expressions are but few ; still we cannot ignore the statement which Sītā made before Anasūyā in the forest. She says that when she came of age, her father, Janaka, was beset with care and became as sad as a poor man mourning the sudden loss of his little wealth ; for, the father of a nubile daughter, even though he be Indra's peer, has scorn and despise in store for him not only from his equals but also from his inferiors (II. 118. 34-5).

Such sentiments suggest that the birth of a daughter was not hailed with joy in the family for the obvious reason that it filled the parents with anxiety about her marriage. This raises the question if the people at times did not take recourse to somehow dispose of their newly-born daughters to get rid of the anxiety they brought in their train. A simile used by Vālmīki is pertinent. Sītā, bewailing her fate, while in captivity at Laṅkā, is likened to a weeping girl exposed and abandoned in a lonely forest (V. 28. 2). The circumstances in which Sītā herself was discovered by Janaka merit notice. It is held that while ploughing the sacrificial field, Janaka found her as a foundling, and smeared with dust (II. 118. 28-9). The mythical origin of Sītā as having sprung from the bosom of the Earth is, however, unacceptable to commonsense. Can it then be that Sītā was an abandoned babe who was later found, and brought up as his daughter, by King Janaka ?

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[1] T. Sundaracharya : *Studies in the Rāmāyaṇa Women Characters* (The Free Press, Madras, November 17, 1945).

[2] It was binding on kinsmen to give away the daughter in marriage to a bridegroom (VII. 25. 28 ; 4. 21). The task of securing a proper husband for the daughter entailed much hardship for the parents, so much so that "to be the father of a daughter" (*kanyā-pitṛtva*) became a source of anxiety to all who loved prestige. It was, first of all, not at all certain as to who would woo her. Then, secondly, parents were concerned at their daughter's advanced youth and the reluctance of suitors to seek her for fear of rejection. A daughter keeps three families—mother's, father's and husband's—in suspense about her moral chastity ; for, no one knows how things will go—whether the bride will lead a good life and bring happiness (VII. 9. 8-11).

There is, however, no evidence to justify the deduction that the society harboured any inborn feeling of hatred or repulsion against a daughter or a woman. The epic furnishes good ground to assume that once a daughter was begotten, utmost solicitude was bestowed on her and full latitude given to her for complete development of her personality. Love for children, which is a dominant instinct in the humans, was felt towards her also. She is described as *dayitā* (I. 32. 25) or dear to her father. Childless Janaka is depicted as beaming with paternal affection on finding Sītā in the field whom he adopted as his own. His eldest queen too reared her up and showered on her all a mother's love (II. 118. 30, 33). If the daughter was at all a source of anxiety to the parents, it was because of their concern to see her well-placed in her later life in comfort and happiness.[1] It was always important to marry off the girl fittingly. The problem of her marriage was not decided somehow or anyhow by the parents, but was given due deliberation in respect of choice and selection guided by certain guiding principles and rules and not by any personal infatuation or fancy.[2] The elaborate *svayaṁvara* organized by Janaka with a desire to find the best warrior of the land as his son-in-law (II. 118. 38, 42) is a positive proof indicating that the daughter was not in any way an object of indifference in the family. During his love-plaints for Sītā after her abduction, Rāma feels particularly sad when he thinks how poignantly distressed Janaka would become on learning about the loss of his dear daughter (IV. 1. 106).

As a matter of fact, an unmarried daughter was generally regarded as an object of good omen. The sight of pretty and well-dressed girls, and the feeling of being greeted by them with festal honour, was supposed to bring good luck. Thus, when Rāma returns from exile and marches to his solemn consecration as king, there go before him, as bringing weal, young girls as also cows and Brāhmaṇas (VI. 128. 38). The presence of virgins in religious ceremonies and public festivals was believed to enhance the auspiciousness of the occasion. Eight well-decked virgins are, therefore, named as important objects of good luck on the occasion of the preparations for consecrating Rāma as crown prince (II. 14. 36). Maidens also took part in sprinkling the king-elect with the coronation water (*abhiṣeka*, VI. 128. 62). The giving away of a daughter in marriage (*kanyā-dāna*) was believed to confer good merit on her father (I. 72. 15) ; it was his express and holy duty (*paro dharmaḥ*) to find a husband for his daughter. A daughter, endowed with excellences, was like the goddess of prosperity (Lakṣmī) incarnate. A new era of happiness and prosperity is said to have been ushered in the family of Janaka after he obtained and adopted Sītā as a daughter (II. 118. 34).

Vālmīki does not throw much light directly on the education imparted to young girls of the time. Nevertheless, a fair idea of the sort of training the girls received in their parental home can be made out.

The women of the age were actively associated in the observance of rituals and sacraments either alone or in the company of their husbands. It is obvious that they must have received ritual instructions before marriage. On the day of Rāma's installation as heir-apparent, Kausalyā was found offering oblations into the fire while intoning prescribed *mantras* (II. 20. 15). Sītā is often represented as offering her *sandhyā* prayers (V. 14. 49), and Tārā is termed as *mantravit* or well-grounded in sacred formulas (IV. 16. 12).

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[1] A. S. Altekar : *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, p. 7.
[2] P. H. Valavalkar : *Hindu Social Institutions*, p. 198f ; cf. I. 33. 10.

Besides instructions in rituals, girls acquired a sufficient knowledge of the scriptures, Smṛtis and Purāṇas, not only from their parents (II. 27. 10) but also from Brāhmaṇas and hermits (II. 29. 8, 13). The knowledge gathered in this way seems to have been thorough. Sītā in her father's home had come into contact with priests, Brāhmaṇas, astrologers and learned men, and was at home in quite a few branches of traditional lore (II. 29. 9, 17 ; VI. 48. 2). She is represented as fully conversant with the puranic lore of the day (II. 30. 6 ; V. 24. 9-12). Kaikeyī and Tārā too display an extensive knowledge of the scriptures.

At the same time, parents were not oblivious of the necessity of equipping their daughters with practical education. Daughters were given instructions pertaining to their duties and obligations after marriage. Sītā, insistent on accompanying Rāma to the forest, tells him that she is well instructed by her parents regarding wifely duties, rendering all further persuasion for her to stay back unnecessary (II. 27. 10). The princesses of the time were also initiated into political rights and duties so that they should prove valuable helpmates to their royal consorts. Besides, many girls were imparted training in some of the fine arts like music and dancing. For instance, ladies in Rāvaṇa's harem were dextrous at playing all sorts of musical instruments (V. 10. 37-49).

It appears that girls were not barred from even military training, as is clear from the fact that Kaikeyī accompanied Daśaratha to the Devāsura battle. When the King was rendered unconscious by wounds received in the battle, Kaikeyī, by her pluck and resourcefulness, removed him from the battle-field and saved his life (II. 9. 15-6). This implies a knowledge of driving war chariots and rendering first-aid. Physically strong women were not a rarity in those days. The sacrificial horse of Daśaratha's Aśvamedha was decapitated by his eldest queen, Kausalyā, by her own hand with three strokes of the sword (I. 14. 33). Obviously, she must have been a very strong and true Kṣatriya lady. In Laṅkā, women were trained as armed guards, and the guards of Sītā at Aśokavāṭikā were only women-soldiers bearing arms (V. 17. 15).

While they, no doubt, got a thorough education, during maidenhood, girls were allowed considerable freedom and opportunities for recreation. They were not coerced into any seclusion or *purdā*. With the choicest ornaments on, they used to frequent city gardens and parks for play and sport in the evening, and heartily enjoy music and dancing at such places (II. 67. 17). The legend of the daughters of Kuśanābha relates that they were freely allowed the privilege of enjoying outdoor life ; in the bloom of youth, with the gift of beauty, fair-decked, dight with splendid ornaments, they are described as going into the park like autumn lightning, singing, dancing and playing musical instruments, finding greatest joy there—a sight that captivated the heart of even the superhuman Vāyu (I. 32. 13, 15-6).

THE WIFE

Once married, the woman's position in her new home was that of a *vadhū* (I. 77. 11) or daughter-in-law in relation to the parents of her husband. Being newly wedded, she was more or less a stranger in the family for some time. It was her concern, therefore, to adapt herself to the traditions and sentiments of the house of which she now became a member. In this she was helped by the affectionate attitude of the other members of the household. The mother-in-law took care to instruct her inexperienced daughter-in-law as to how she should conduct herself towards her husband in different situations (II. 118. 7 ; 39. 20-5).

The epic clearly shows that the most cordial relations subsisted between parents-in-law and daughters-in-law. Daśaratha and Kausalyā are shown to have the tenderest love for their daughter-in-law, Sītā. This love manifests itself with a difference when Sītā has to leave with her husband for the forest.

In regard to a wife's relations with her husband, the emphasis was unmistakably on faithfulness. It was impressed on her that the husband is her mainstay (*gatirekā patir nāryāḥ,* II. 61. 24) ; and without him she simply could not live (II. 29. 7). Neither father, mother, son and friends, nor her own self is a shelter for a woman in this or after-life ; it is husband alone that is her true support (II. 27. 6). Without a string there is no lute, without a wheel there is no chariot, and without a husband no woman can be happy even though she have a hundred sons (II. 39. 29). Father, mother, son, brother, daughter-in-law—all of them abide by the consequences of their actions ; it is the wife alone that shares the fate of her husband (II. 27. 4-5). The husband enhances the beauty of a female more than her ornaments (V. 16. 26).

The solemn advice which Rāma gave to his mother (who was desirous of leaving her husband and accompanying her son to the forest) well embodies the ethics of *strī-dharma* as conceived in the age and followed to this day (II. 24). For the wife, her husband is her refuge and her religion, her lord and her god, her preceptor and her guileless friend (II. 21. 60 ; 24. 21 ; 118. 2 ; IV. 23. 11). Unflinching loyalty to the husband is, therefore, an article of faith with an ideal wife. A wife is to follow her husband through thick and thin, in all conditions of life (II. 29. 20). The shade of the husband's feet is preferable to a palace and a celestial car (II. 27. 9). What the father or brother gives her has bounds ; but him that gives the unbounded, the husband, which wife would not honour (II. 39. 30) ? So long as her husband lives, a wife has to serve him. That is the law eternal. Abandonment of the husband is the most dreadful sin a woman might commit—impious even in thought or dream (II. 24. 12-3).

It was, indeed, a very rigorous discipline—complete self-abnegation—that the society demanded from a wife. She had to be entirely oblivious of the frailties of her husband and render the most self-denying service to him. "To women cognizant of virtue, the husband, be he virtuous or not, is nothing short of a visible godhead" (II. 62. 8). According to the standard set up by Anasūyā, for women of noble character husband is the highest godhead—though he may have a bad character, or live after his lusts, or be bereft of worldly goods (II. 117. 23-4). Sītā entirely endorses this view and declares : "Even if a husband should be poor, and of a disreputable character, he should be ungrudgingly obeyed by the like of me ; not to say about one who is crowned with qualities, kind, self-controlled, of steady affection, righteous-souled and dear as a father or mother. I know that a woman's spiritual guide is her husband, and her only asceticism (*tapas*) is ministering to his comforts" (II. 118. 2-9).

The epic is full of praise for womanhood faithful in wedlock. Among the instances of conjugal fidelity, Śacī, the wife of the king of the gods, is proverbial for her chastity. And so is Rohiṇī, united in eternal wedlock to the Moon (II. 118. 11), and Sāvitrī and Damayantī who never forsook their lords despite vicissitudes of fortune (V. 24. 9-12). The paragon of *pativratās* whom the Rāmāyaṇa depicts in all exuberance of poetry is the captive Sītā in Rāvaṇa's stronghold (fig. 24). Her heroic endurance of all sufferings, her proud rejection of the advances of the Rākṣasa king and her unwavering love for her husband—all these entitle her to carry the palm as the ideal wife. "It is remarkable how Sītā's love and regard for her husband survived the rapid succession of the infamy and calamities of abduction, the joys and sorrows of subsequent release, the glamour and festivities of restoration and the tragedy and affliction of final repudiation."[1]

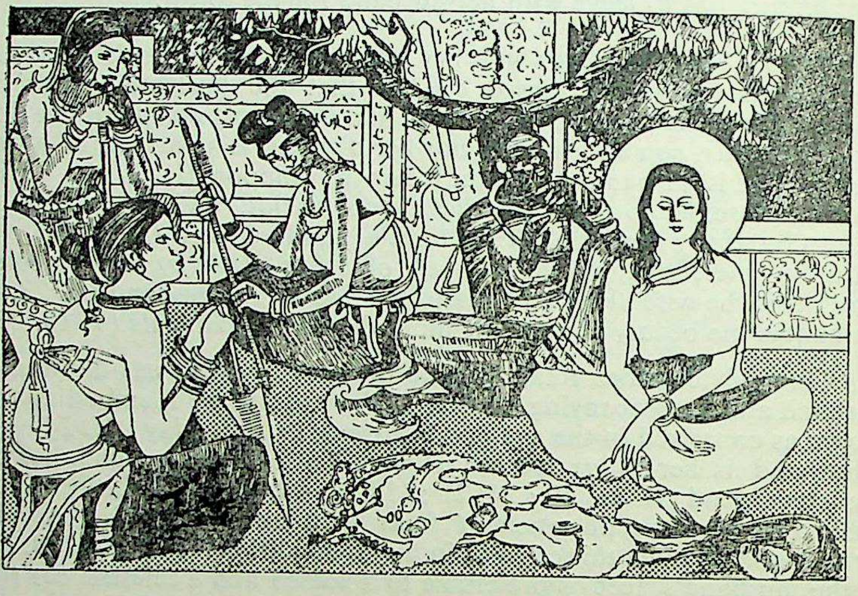

Fig. 24. Sītā in the Aśoka-vātikā (B. N. Jijja).

There are, however, instances of some women who, though faithful in marital life, give utterance to their discontent. Thus Kausalyā, ever devoted to her lord in spite of his senile partiality for Kaikeyī (II. 20. 38, 42), speaks bitterly of him in Rāma's presence for his callous neglect of her. When Rāma is gone to the forest she, in a fit of grief, heaps accusation after accusation on her husband for the injustice done to Rāma, but her innate excellence as a *pativratā* beautifully comes out when Daśaratha with folded hands begs for mercy. She then realizes her folly and ashamed of her accusations, falls at his feet, humbly apologizing for her fault. For, as she says, a woman who is to be humbly propitiated by her lord, forfeits her claim to being a lady and to happiness here and hereafter (II. 62).

A wife's unwavering fidelity to her husband endowed her with wonderful powers by which she could manage to keep her honour unsullied even when in the clutches of abductors. Her *cāritra*, or virtuous conduct, guarded her even when left alone in the house (II. 45. 25). A foul attempt on the wife's chastity called forth all her latent zeal, power of resistance and indomitable fervour, and sense of self-respect. Even Sītā, otherwise so tender and mild, soft and dreamy as the moonlight, turns into a strong heroine of daring and unyielding pride when it comes to defending her virtue. Rāvaṇa never ventured to commit an outrage on Sītā whose infallible chastity served as a protecting belt to her purity of conduct (*rakṣitā svena tejasā*, VI. 118. 16). She consistently treated the infatuated Rākṣasa with outspoken scorn (III. 47. 37-48 ; V. 22. 12-22). She felt herself quite equal to the task of reducing her abductor to a heap of ashes, but she desisted from this for want of

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Rāma's permission and for fear of the loss of penance the act would entail (V. 22. 20).

It is true, nevertheless, that a woman's strength can never equal man's brute force ; frail and delicate as by nature she is, she cannot slay the man bent on evil (VII. 26. 51 ; 17. 31), and she can easily be overpowered physically. Notwithstanding this, the abductor of faithful wives was sure to meet with destruction (III. 48. 23 ; 56. 17), for "the tears of chaste wives would not be shed in vain" (VI. 111. 67). It was devoutly believed that the moral fervour of a faithful wife could send to doom anyone who dared to threaten her chastity. Mandodarī held Rāvaṇa's death to be the outcome of the curses of "wives" abducted by him and of women widowed through his indiscriminate slaughter of their husbands (VI. 111. 64-6).

Just as a wife was expected to be faithful to her husband, it is laid down that a husband shall not forsake his wife. A wife, virtuous, devoted and attached to her husband, could not be deserted by him as she was the sharer of his joys and sorrows (II. 29. 19-20). Desertion of a wife was considered a blasphemy (II. 27. 3). Suicide was the only recourse open to a wife unjustly discarded (II. 30. 20).

The epic, however, sanctions repudiation of a vicious wife. Such deserted wives include firstly those women who, because of some grave moral obliquity on their part, are forsaken by their husbands and are re-accepted only after the expiry of an imposed period of penitence. To this category belongs Ahalyā, charming wife of sage Gautama, who was guilty of a clandestine love-affair with her paramour, Indra, who visited her in her husband's guise. Gautama chastised her for her fickleness. "Ruin to thee," he cried, "and away from my *āśrama*" (VII. 30. 36-7). Ahalyā pleaded she had been deceived by Indra's guise and asked for forgiveness (VII. 30. 40). Gautama finally agreed to her re-union with him only on the condition that she purified

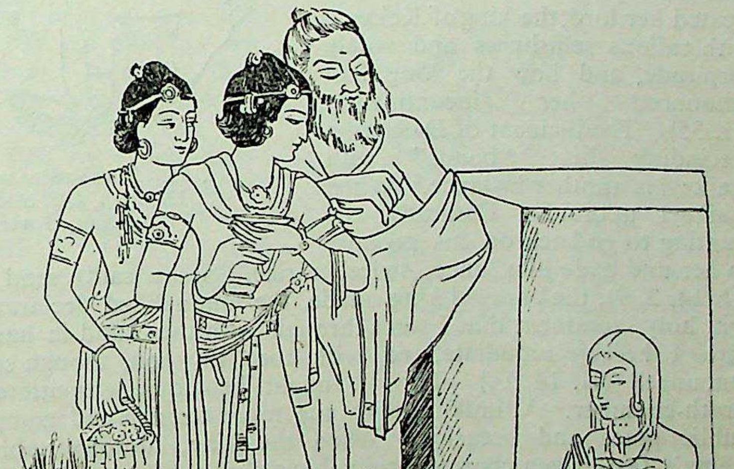

Fig. 25. Ahalyā praying to Rāma to redeem her from her husband's curse (Nandalal Bose).

herself by long and mortifying penance in stone-dead seclusion and obtained absolution from Rāma, the Kosala prince (I. 48. 29-32). So, Ahalyā suffered prolonged seclusion and austerity in atonement for her sin until Rāma ended her period of curse (I. 49. 20 ; fig. 25 and 26). A similar instance is the repudiation of Sītā by Rāma after the battle of Laṅkā. In this case, the repudiation was based on a mere suspicion of Sītā's chastity and was resorted to by Rāma to avoid public scandal. He wholeheartedly re-accepted her after she successfully came out of the fire-ordeal.

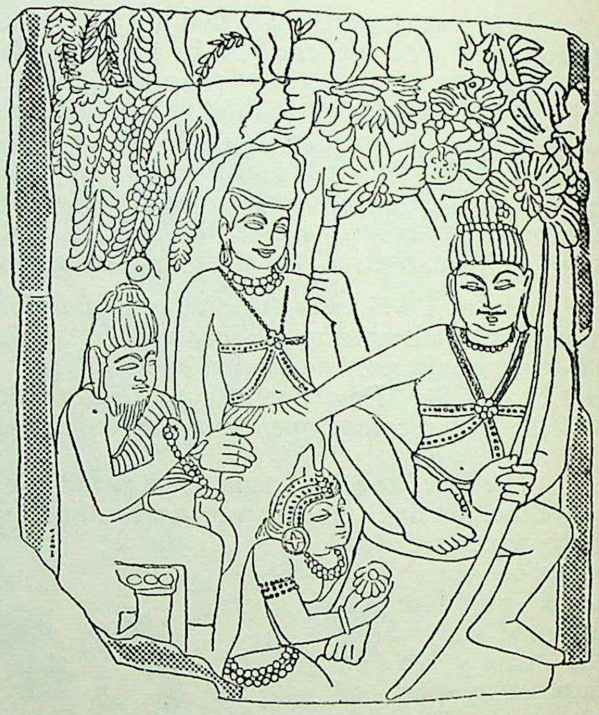

Fig. 26. Rāma redeeming Ahalyā ; sculpture, Deogarh, fifth century A.D. (National Museum, Government of India).

To the second and larger category belong women who are forsaken for good by their husbands and never re-accepted. Sumantra tells Kaikeyī how her mother had treated her lord, the king of Kekaya, with callous selfishness and wifely turpitude, and how the king had renounced her incontinently (II. 35). The incident of Daśaratha rescinding his "bonds" with Kaikeyī is another instance.[1] When Kaikeyī upbraided Daśaratha for wanting to go back on his promise to her and bade him (once, twice, thrice, as she said) send Rāma to the forest (II. 14. 2, 9), the enraged king made the unqualified declaration : "O sinful one, that holy sacrament that I went through with thee hand in hand before the sacred Fire I hereby repudiate, and with thee thy son, though sprung from my loins, I renounce" (II. 14. 14). This, it might be urged, was uttered in the privacy of the wrath-chamber. Vālmīki reserves the more terrible and comprehensive curse to a public place and occasion. When the king, no longer able to descry the dust of Rāma's fast-driven chariot, broke down, Kausalyā and Kaikeyī rushed to him for help, but the king turning on Kaikeyī fiercely uttered the words : "Kaikeyi, thou of vicious conduct, do not touch me ; I do not wish to look at thee ; thou art no wife to me. I own no kinship to thee. I renounce thee who hast cast thy duty aside. The compact I made with thee, going round the sacred Fire, my hand clasped in thine, and all that it meant for happiness in this world and for salvation in the next, I repudiate here and now" (II. 42. 6-9). True to his oath, the stricken king passed his few remaining days with the senior queen, nor was the unhappy Kaikeyī reconciled with him till his death. Hence it was that when, by the grace of Maheśvara, the departed king appeared before Rāma after Rāvaṇa was slain, Rāma implored him to lift the curse that rested on Kaikeyī, and Daśaratha consented to revoke it (VI. 119. 25-6).

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[1] See R. Narayana Aiyar : *The Summons to Bharata*, pp. 12-3. (Sundaresa Sarma Com. Vol.).

Apart from spiritual qualities, an ideal wife was deemed to be one who had certain physical standards (also referred to in the Rāmāyaṇa). The smile of a lovely face, the tender grace of features, the magic glance of eyes and the sweetness of voice are the most enticing of spells which make a wife the lasting abode of a husband's steadfast affection. The ideal of feminine beauty and charm is repeatedly set forth by Vālmīki in the course of his descriptions of the famous beauties of the day (VII. 5. 12-20 ; III. 46. 15-23).

A perfectly built figure, faultless in its details, is one of the rarest things in the world (*sarvāṅgī sarva-ramyo hi kaścil lakṣe prajāyate*) ; and in spite of general resemblances of features and of form between woman and woman, it is not possible to take any particular figure as a standard or ideal for all. Features like hands, feet, eyes, ears and breasts are given to all women in pairs and, roughly speaking, these are structurally the same in one woman as in another. But our intimate acquaintance with human race, and our habit of paying close attention to the details of a woman's features, make us acutely conscious of minute differences of physiognomy that the choice of an aesthetically ideal figure becomes a matter of difficulty for the poet-artist. But in the case of lower animals and plant organisms the resemblances are much closer and there seems to be a certain well-defined fixity of form between, say, two birds or animals of the same species or between two leaves or flowers of the same variety. Eggs laid by one hen have the same smoothness and regularity of contour as the eggs of any other hen, and any leaf taken from one *pīpal* tree has the same triangular form and pointed tip that we find in any other. It is for this reason perhaps that our master poets, since Vālmīki to date, have described the shapes of female limbs not by comparison with those of other women but always in terms of flowers or birds, in terms of plant or animal features, that is.[1] This trait in Vālmīki will become amply clear from the following details which he gives while portraying ideal Beauty.

Ideal age for beauty to flower was to be freshly tender—in the prime of youth. Her general build was to be slender, well-built, symmetrical and perfect, having blameless delicate limbs, charming in every part (fig. 27). Complexion—the lustre of pure or burnished gold, or the light-red hue of tender twigs. Arms—round and plump, tender like shoots, and the back—graceful like the pole of a chariot. A lean belly : graced with a goodly navel was a coveted feature with beauties. As for the breasts—they were to be the abode of

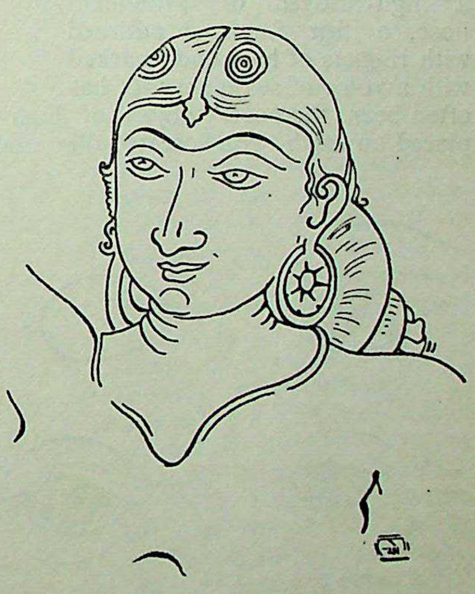

Fig. 27. Bow-like "furrows" on the forehead.

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[1] A. Tagore: *Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy*, pp. 6-7.

charm : high and well-developed, placed on an altitude near the shoulders, of a fair-firm fulness, round, close-set to each other, bold, firm-swelling, with uplifted nipples, graceful, smooth, fit for a string of pearls and like unto wine-palm fruits or golden goblets. Buttocks—high, shapely, spacious and smooth (without down), spread wide and plumply swelling (fig. 28). Eyes—elegant, inebriate, wide, unblemished, with red corners and black pupils, side-long looks and lovely, slender, dark-blue and curly lashes (fig. 29), and brows—glorious like the two bows of the bowman and extending to the ears. A moon-like face—spotless and pellucid and without scars, with a high-bridged or prominent nose, a fair forehead adorned with ringlets of hair and marked with a voice of sweet accents has often been the poets' object of high compliment. Dainty and tender feet : well-placed on earth, with roseate soles and coppery nails, played no small part in enhancing the comeliness of a woman's figure (fig. 30). An indolent gait like that of an intoxicated elephant gave added charm to her natural attractiveness. A

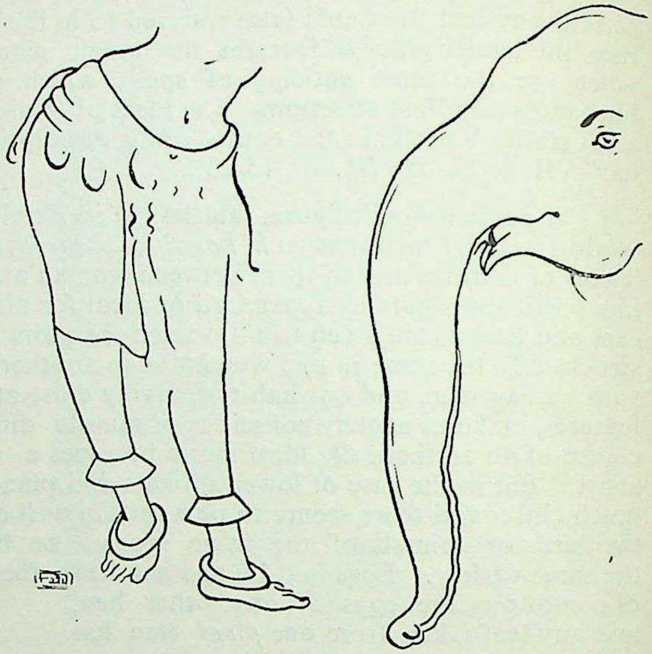

Fig. 28. Thighs like an elephant's trunk.

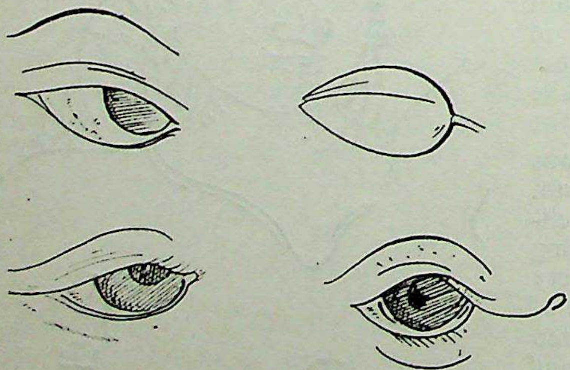

Fig. 29. Lotus-eye, deer-eye and fish-eye.

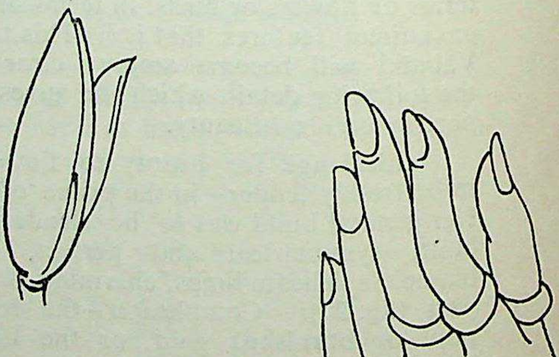

Fig. 30. Fingers like lotus-petals.

braid of dark, curly and long hair : resembling a black serpent and flowing to the hips. Hands—tender as young shoots ; and finger-nails reddish, projecting and graceful (fig. 31). Rubeous lips : luscious and reddish like the *bimba* ; and the waist—so slender that it could be got round even by fingers. Stature—of middle size, with the neck yellowish and tender and having the hue of sandal. Teeth—shining white, stainless, pointed, smooth and of the right cut and shape. Thighs—fair, round, fleshy and strong like the trunk of an elephant or a plantain tree (fig. 32)...rounded off the physical perfection of a beautiful woman.[1]

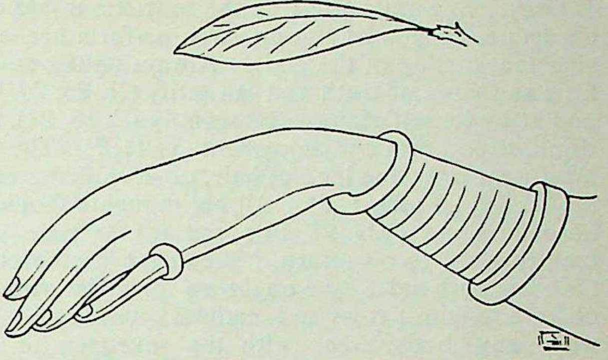

Fig. 31. Leaf-like arms.

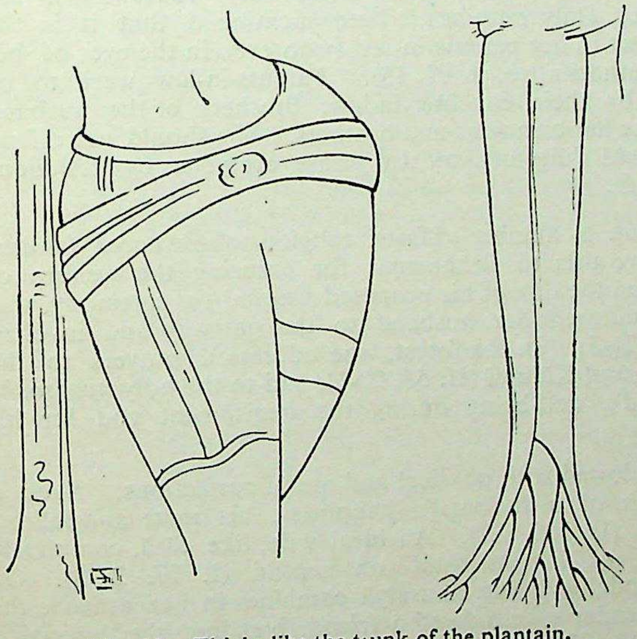

Fig. 32. Thighs like the trunk of the plantain.

But the glory of loveliness and the bloom of youth, of an ideal wife, could have their true fulfilment only in her nobility of soul and fineness of feelings. Indeed, the beauty and charm of a wife's physical frame, all her toilet and adornment, are said to be shorn of their effect in the absence of the highest ornament—the husband (V. 16. 26). In fact, attachment to the husband is considered to be the only ornament of a wife (V. 17. 21). Hence, endeavouring to enhance the joy of the husband as much by her excellent qualities as by her loveliness of form—was the hall-mark of a model wife. She was to be virtuous and endued with a sweet temperament, always exerting to gain the full confidence of him whose beloved she was (I. 77. 27-8). Possessing a genial nature (III. 34. 20), she was to have a soft and sweet tongue (II. 12. 69 ; IV. 1. 30), always preluding her speech with a smile (V. 16. 21 ; III. 58. 10). She was to do her utmost to promote her husband's happiness by agreeably ministering to his comforts (III. 34. 15) ; the *śuśrūṣā* or service of the husband was to be her highest religion (II. 24. 28). A wife should never be guilty of improper or unpleasant conduct towards her husband (II. 12. 20). Vālmīki depicts Rāma seated on a golden sofa in his palace with Sītā by his side with a chowrie in her hand (II. 16. 10)—a typical scene which beautifully brings out the humility, eagerness for service and love (of the wife towards her husband).

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[1] For references see S. N. Vyas : "The Valmikian Conception of an Ideal Wife" (*Journal of Oriental Institute*, Baroda, vol. ii, part 4, pp. 303-10).

Special injunctions are enjoined on a wife during the interval her husband is away. She must abide by the restrictions laid down by the husband before his departure. She must rise up early, perform her ablutions and undertake with due rites the worship of the gods. Always righteous, she must keep herself engaged in fasts and vows of truth and austerity (II. 26. 29-30, 37-8). She must forsake fineries and attire herself plainly and scantily (V. 15. 21). She must not indulge in extravagant drink, decoration and enjoyment (V. 11. 2). The *proṣita-bhartṛkā* (wife in separation) must wear only one lock of hair, observe fasts, offer prayers and lead an ascetic's life (V. 19. 20 ; 20. 1, 8). All her thoughts should be centred on the memory of her husband alone (VII. 97. 14), and all the time she should eagerly and anxiously look forward to his return. She ought in no event to have for her god anyone other than her husband ; she ought to practise forgiveness, lie on the bare ground, observe religious vows and maintain virtue (V. 28. 12). She should not associate with any body, even with the sovereign of the celestials (V. 11. 3). On no account is she to allow willingly her body to come into contact with another man's, no matter his trustworthiness. When Hanumān offered to carry the captive Sītā on his shoulders to Rāma, she apologetically declined the offer, feeling it derogatory for herself as well as to Rāma's honour (V. 37. 62-4).

In this connection it must be said that the careful, busy housewife is left altogether untouched in the epic. Only once has it been mentioned that it is the duty of a young wife to be subject to her parents-in-law (who even in the eyes of her husband are worshipful and authoritative, I. 77. 13). Parents-in-law were to be honoured with daily obeisance by their daughter-in-law. Brothers of the husband are to be looked after by her like her own sons and brothers. She should not offend anyone by her conduct and should diligently try to please everyone by assiduous service and devotion (II. 26. 30-5).

Married women undertook a number of fasts, religious observances (*vratas*) and penances (*niyamas*), and gave gifts to Brāhmaṇas for ensuring the welfare of their husbands. When Rāma, on the day of his proposed *yauvarājya* ceremony, was summoned by his father, Sītā followed her husband to the gateway and invoked gods' blessings for him (II. 16. 21-5). In the forest, she addressed prayers to the goddesses Gaṅgā (II. 52. 82-91) and Kālindī (II. 55. 20-1), and to the holy *nyagrodha* tree (II. 55. 24) for her husband's well-being during the banishment and for his safe return home.

So, a model wife is one endowed with physical and moral perfections. Such a wife *is* the keystone of the arch of a husband's happiness, his mate and fellow-traveller on the highway of life (II. 109. 27). An ideal wife, like Sītā, completely focused the mind and heart of her husband on herself (I. 77. 27-8). On Daśaratha's own testimony, a model wife like Kausalyā combines in her attitude the hard labour of a slave and the tender solicitude of a friend, blending the love of a mother, a wife and a sister (II. 12. 67-8). Vasiṣṭha calls wife "the very soul of him who marries her" (II. 37. 24). Therefore, as long as a man has no wife and does not procreate, he is no complete individual (II. 75. 35) ; only when he has a wife and propagates his species is he complete (I. 18. 51). A wife, who is dear and obedient, and bears a son for her husband, is the virtual consummation of the three objects of life—*dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*—objects which otherwise are endlessly at feud mutually (II. 21. 57).

What has been said so far may suggest that the woman of the Rāmāyaṇa age had only duties to perform but had no rights of her own. Such a conclusion, we are afraid, would be unjustified. Women had certain well-defined rights (*e.g.* the right to protection and maintenance, to property and conjugal rights). The foremost rights of a wife, and the corresponding obligation of a husband, is the provision for her support and maintenance. It has been always repugnant to Indian feeling that a husband should let himself be supported by his wife, as instanced by Sītā's contemptuous reference to actors living on the vice and earnings of their wives (II. 30. 8). The word for husband is *bhartā* (II. 62. 8), meaning supporter or nourisher, or *pati* (VII. 48. 17), protector ; and for the wife *bhāryā* (III. 2. 17)—she that nourishes him by husbanding all the family resources. It is, therefore, man's duty, repeatedly stressed, to shelter and cherish the woman he has married. She must be well provided with the comforts of life (III. 47. 4 ; VI. 111. 33). Sītā, though intent on accompanying Rāma to the forest, expects him to look after her in all respects (II. 30. 15 ; 27. 14). It was disgraceful on the husband's part to eat alone in the house ignoring his wife and children (II. 75. 34). Rāma asks Bharata at Citrakūṭa to appease the women at home and to keep them well protected (II. 100. 49).

The *kanyā-dhana* or bridal gifts offered by parents at their daughter's marriage became her *strī-dhana* in modern terminology. This property must have remained at the disposal of the wife. Besides, kings occasionally conferred property and gifts on their wives who then acquired absolute rights over their use and disposal. Rāma is said to have conferred on Sītā an excellent pearl necklace crested with precious gems, which she bestowed on Hanumān in token of his meritorious services (VI. 128. 77-9). The queens generally gave away the income from their property in charity, as their personal needs were met by their husbands. Daśaratha had conferred many villages on his chief queen, Kausalyā, for the maintenance of her dependants (II. 31. 22). Kausalyā was very rich on account of her vast *strī-dhana*, and hosts of initiates used to approach her for help (II. 32. 21). That the wife retained her property even after her husband's death is clear from the fact that Vānara ladies, who accompanied Rāma from Kiṣkindhā to Ayodhyā in the Puṣpaka, could not suppress their eagerness to behold the wealth and riches of the wives of Daśaratha (VI. 123. 35).

As for conjugal rights, it is emphatically laid down that the husband, during the proper season (*ṛtukāla*, I. 48. 18), must visit his wife and that it would be a sin for him not to fulfil her wishes then. Bharata condemningly speaks of the evil-minded man (*duṣṭātmā*) who does not let his wife have her rights when she has performed her ablutions at the end of her unclean period (*ṛtusnātā*) and is "in mood" (II. 75. 52). Just as chastity was the most valuable possession of a wife, a husband too was expected to remain faithful to his spouse (*sva-dāra-nirata*, III. 38. 31). Bharata condemned the man who remains away from his wife and consorts with the wives of others (II. 75. 55).

Another duty of a husband, and privilege of the wife, was to share all sacred rites and ceremonies. She helped him in discharging two of his debts—namely, to the gods by associating with him in sacrifices, and to the forefathers by procreating sons for continuing the line. Her character as a *saha-dharma-cāriṇī* indicates recognition of her status as an equal partner in man's code of conduct. Husband and wife were supposed to share the fruits of their actions together (II. 27. 5). A wife, as already said, was the better-half, the very soul of the husband (II. 37. 24). Her presence was invariably necessary for initiation at all sacrifices. Daśaratha's queens took part in the horse sacrifice (I. 8. 23-4) and the task of slaying the sacrificial horse devolved on the chief queen (I. 14. 33). Tārā upbraided the fallen Vālī "for having bathed without me, your wife, in the stream of Rāma's shafts at the end of your war-sacrifice" (IV. 23. 27).

The association of a wife in the coronation rituals further establishes the status of equality accorded to her in some of the most essentials of ceremonies. A widow took part in the funeral ceremony of her husband (II. 76. 20). The wives of Vālī are described as joining his funeral procession along with men (IV. 25. 35-6). Women often led the way on such occasions (II. 103. 21). They also participated in offering water libations (*tarpaṇa*) to their deceased relations (II. 76. 20, 23 ; 103. 21 ; IV. 25. 35-6).

Normally, religious prayers and sacrifices were performed jointly by husband and wife. If the husband's participation was not available for some reason or another, his wife could perform the rites alone. In the absence of her husband she had the right of attending to the daily *agnihotra* (II. 75. 14). Worship of the gods (II. 26. 30) and performance of *sandhyā* were not denied to women. Kausalyā performed all alone the *svasti-yāga* ceremony to ensure felicity for her son (II. 20. 15-9), evidently because Daśaratha was engaged in assuaging the sulky Kaikeyī. Similarly, Tārā is represented as performing the *svasti* rite for her husband (IV. 16. 12), probably because Vālī was too busy (equipping himself for the battle with Sugrīva) to participate in his wife's sacrifices. These instances show that woman's participation in sacrifices was real and that very often husbands used to leave the affair to the exclusive charge of their wives when busy otherwise.[1]

How an intelligent wife became her husband's true counsellor by criticizing as well as appreciating his actions is exemplified in Sītā's association with Rāma. When Rāma proposes to depart to the forest leaving her at the court of Ayodhyā, she frankly deprecates the proposal and takes strong exception to his advice to her for being obedient and suppliant to Bharata in his absence. Apart from the domestic sphere, Sītā weighed her husband's public acts. When in the Daṇḍaka forest, she argued with him regarding the propriety of his engaging in hostilities with the Rākṣasas in order to relieve the ascetics of the hermitages in the land. This, she thought, was not his business, and she would not like him to attack the Rākṣasas unprovoked (III. 9). But she was not always a carping wife. Rāma's refusal to entertain Śūrpaṇakhā's proposal for marriage and his heroism in fighting Khara and his host, for her sake, evoked Sītā's fondest admiration. During her captivity in Laṅkā, she ever recalled her husband's high accomplishments and magnanimity of heart with great pride. Even her criticisms were saturated with inimitable charm and sweetness : "I have only spoken through feminine fickleness, otherwise who is capable of speaking to thee on the import of *dharma* ? Impelled by the affection and honour in which I hold thee, I merely remind thee of this matter ; I dare not teach thee" (III. 9. 24,30). Rāma, too, feels grateful to his wife for her kindly and sincere advice, worthy both of her love and her family, quite becoming the role of a *saha-dharma-cāriṇī* (III. 11. 20-1).

The proverbial meekness of a Hindu wife before her husband, and other relations, however, often turned into righteous indignation when she was unjustly slighted, ill-treated or insulted. When Daśaratha tries to go back on his solemn promise to Kaikeyī, to grant her the two boons, she upbraids him angrily (II. 12. 38-49). Śūrpaṇakhā bitterly censures Khara as spineless for his failure to punish Rāma (III. 21. 16-9), and later scathingly criticizes Rāvaṇa's addiction to sensual enjoyments to the neglect of his royal duties (III. 33. 2, 22).

It is clear that the women of the age wielded a potent influence over men both in political and social spheres. Women like Sītā and Kaikeyī in history have changed the destinies of nations. The "protection" of the good name of a wife often goaded a man to undertake dangerous tasks. Insult to one's wife was deemed to be an insult to one's own honour which could not go unavenged (VI. 115. 13, 16). When Sītā was kidnapped by Virādha, Rāma exclaimed : "Nothing can impart greater anguish to me than the touching of Vaidehī by another—a calamity which surpasses my father's demise and my own deprivation of a kingdom" (III. 2. 21). The main theme of the Rāmāyaṇa hinges on Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā ; the adventures and battles of the epic all turn in the end around her (V. 39. 17). Vālī fought with Māyāvī for the sake of a woman's love (IV. 9. 4). Sugrīva's enmity with Vālī centred on his wife Rumā's forcible seizure by the latter (IV. 10. 28). Janaka was attacked by the disappointed princes who had failed to win Sītā's hand (I. 66. 21).

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[1] A. S. Altekar : *op. cit.*, p. 235.

Behind all major political upheavals lay the power and influence of women. The succession episode in the Ikṣvāku family arose out of feminine rivalry among Daśaratha's wives. Instances of women effectively influencing State policy, and even hints at their capacity to rule, are not lacking. The conferment of regal powers on a woman was acknowledged as quite within the realms of possibility. Rāvaṇa offered to let the sacred water of coronation be poured on Sītā's head (III. 55. 25-7). A testimony to woman's capacity to rule comes from Vasiṣṭha who suggested to Kaikeyī that Sītā, being the very self of Rāma, could govern the realm in his absence as his representative (II. 37. 23-4). An illustrious sage like Vasiṣṭha, having an intimate knowledge of customs and traditions, would not have put forth the proposal if such a right had not been recognized in those days. [Vasiṣṭha's suggestion could not, however, materialize owing to Sītā's determination to accompany Rāma to the forest.]

In the "inner world" of hearth and home, wife was a potent factor. The mighty hold which a beloved queen could exercise on her royal husband is illustrated by Kaikeyī's dominance over senile Daśaratha. Rāma's inability to reject the importunities of Sītā to accompany him to the forest or her prayers to kill the golden deer and fetch its skin, though commonsense told him that a golden deer was impossible and that, if noticed, must conceal some plot, are clear proofs of the strong hold a beloved wife exercised on her lord's mind.

In the homes of commoners as well, wives exerted considerable influence by setting their husbands aright when they were swerving or wanting in any way. When the citizens of Ayodhyā, foiled in their attempts to follow Rāma to the forest (II. 47), returned to their homes in the city, their wives assailed them with taunts at their having failed to accompany Rāma (II. 48. 6-33). Soldiers feared being ridiculed by their wives for any act of cowardice (VI. 66. 20). When Bharata ordered mobilization of the army for a march to Citrakūṭa to prevail upon Rāma to return to Ayodhyā, soldiers' wives, delighted at the news, goaded their husbands to hasten for the auspicious journey (II. 82. 25).

GLORY OF MOTHERHOOD

A wife attains consummation of her life in the blessed state of motherhood; her love and loveliness find happy fruition in perpetuating the lineage (II. 21. 57). From time immemorial, birth of a son from a worthy wife has signified the acme of wedded bliss (I. 18. 51). It is the crowning glory of woman's existence to bring forth into the light of day new and splendid life, endowed with consciousness, from the marrow of her limbs and heart (II. 74. 14). In bearing a son, the wife regenerates the husband and is, therefore, called a *dhātrī*, a *jananī*. In the child are thus reflected in a corporeal form not only the beauty and glory of the wife, and the affection of the husband, but also the satisfaction of the higher social demand for racial continuity.

With such glorification of motherhood in the Rāmāyaṇa, it is but natural to find a *vandhyā*, or barren wife, as the saddest of women. The one mental grief that tormented her was the state of her sterility (II. 20. 37). Hence, motherhood was the cherished dream of every devoted wife (I. 8. 24). Indeed, wife's copulation with her husband was to be only with the desire of begetting a son, and not for the sake of sexual pleasure. The Bālakāṇḍa relates the story of Pārvatī's union with Śiva for the sake of begetting a son. When she was foiled in this by an intrusion from the gods, she was ired and cursed them with impotency. Likewise, she cursed Pṛthivī, who did not wish her a son, not to experience the pleasure of having a son. The gods are described as visibly distressed over the prospect of the accursed barrenness of their spouses (I. 36. 21-5). This shows how poignantly was felt the *vandhyā-tva* or the curse of barrenness.

Ancient Indians always invested matrimony with the hallowed object of parenthood. Selection of the bride and bridegroom was guided not so much by the prospective happiness of the married couple as by the overwhelming desire of procreating a worthy son to perpetuate the race. Even so, emphasis on virginity, and pre-nuptial chastity of the boy, chiefly aimed at purity and excellence of the progeny. The several instances of princely maidens, wooing and wedding celebrated hermits of austere life and continent habits, are pointers to the fact that marriage emphasized not immediate gratification for the wedded pair but procreation of healthy, virile and sturdy progeny, inheriting the best qualities of the parents. The stories of mortal damsels, going after immortal gods and begetting sons matching the latter in prowess and lustre, are truly suggestive of a eugenic approach to the urge for a better species. It seems the ancients felt strongly for the sustenance and invigoration of their race even if it meant a departure from fidelity.

The Rākṣasa Sumālī is described as advising his daughter, Kaikasī, to wait upon the excellent sage, Viśravā, and beget from him sons, splendid like the Sun and glorious like Kubera, who would replenish the Rākṣasa line (VII. 9. 12-3). The Gandharvī Somadā, who had "neither a husband nor was she the wife of anybody," served sage Cūlī in all humility, and when the latter was pleased by her service, she begged of him a son endowed with brahmic lustre (I. 33. 17-8). When love-sick Vāyu, the wind-god, tried to violate the chastity of Añjanā, wife of a Vānara chief Kesarī, she remonstrated, but was pacified when she was promised a son (Hanumān) as valiant, intelligent and swift as the god himself (IV. 66. 18-9). It is noteworthy that, contrary to our present-day notions, the society attached no odium to such issues obtained outside wedlock, and an occasional aberration on the mother's part in no way hampered the son's rise to fame. Brahmadatta, "mental son" of sage Cūlī conferred on Somadā, was held eligible to espouse the hands of the daughters of King Kuśanābha (I. 33. 11-22). Śatānanda, son of Ahalyā who was guilty of adultery with Indra, could rise to be the chaplain of King Janaka (I. 51. 1).

Meticulous purity of conduct by an expectant mother was necessary if she desired a son after her heart. Kaśyapa told his wife, Diti, that she could beget a son competent to slay even the lord of heaven if she incurred no breach of conduct during the specified period (I. 46. 6). Untimely copulation was supposed to have a deleterious effect on the character of the progeny. Kaikasī waited upon Viśravā with the desire for a son at twilight—a time considered very inauspicious for conception—and hence the sons born to her were terrible and grim-visaged Rākṣasas (VII. 9. 22-4).

Signs of pregnancy in a wife conferred supreme felicity on the husband. The father-to-be showed particular care and consideration for his wife passing through labour, and generously offered to fulfil any of her cravings. Gratification of the longings of an expectant mother was a cardinal, sacred duty of the husband.

Precocity among young boys was attributed in ancient India to the special circumstances and environments in which their mothers lived during the period of expectancy. Our traditional literature often narrates stories about the pregnant wives of Vedic scholars reading Vedas along with their husbands, as a result of which their sons would manifest intellectual precocity and become, from the start, as learned and saintly as their fathers. It is related in the Uttarakāṇḍa (2. 31·3) that as Mrs. Pulastya used to listen to and learn Vedas from, Pulastya, her husband, reading them, the son she bore was significantly called Viśravā, who too became engaged in Vedic studies at an early age, developed a fine character, and matured into a learned youth—abiding by and delighting in the course of Vedic study (*śrutimān*, *vrata-rata*), like his father.[1]

There was a common belief that swarms of monsters were always roaming about to harm a mother and her new-born babe. Slightest inadvertence in conduct offered a welcome loophole to evil spirits to attack and destroy the womb. Various means—rituals and magic—for driving off these influences, which are witnessed even in Vedic literature, are also utilized in the Rāmāyaṇa. Kaśyapa, after blessing his wife with a son from his loins, performed some magical rites (like smoothing her hand with his hand to ward off any evil hindering the birth of the desired son), touching and uttering the benediction : "Blessed be thy womb !" (I. 46. 7). Again, as soon as Sītā had brought forth her twins, holy Vālmīki was called in to see to the spirit-banning protective measures. He drove away the Rakṣas and Bhūtas. Famed for being exceptionally powerful, holy *kuśa* grass was employed in these rites (VII. 66. 5-6).

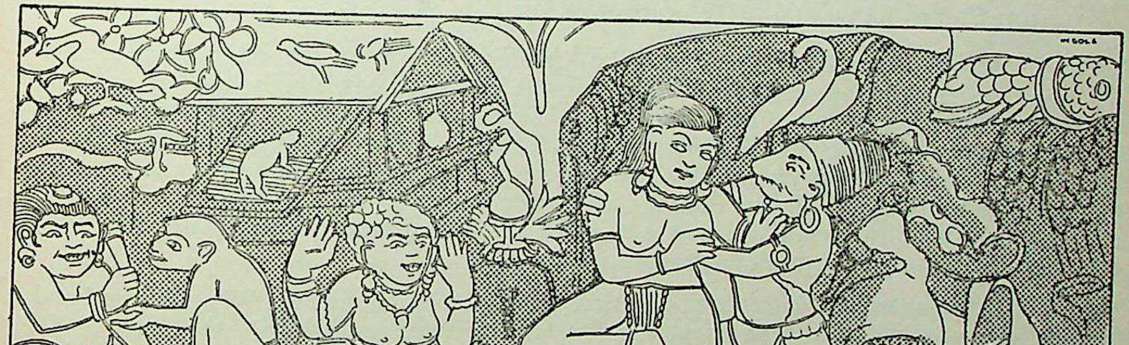

Fig. 33. Abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Abortion and miscarriage were known as *garbha-parisrava* and *garbha-skanna* (I. 37. 26), and killing of the fruit of the womb (foetus, *bhrūṇa-hatyā*) was a crime strongly condemned. Performance of obstetric operations was certainly known. In cases of difficult labour, surgeons undertook cutting of the foetus with sharp and precision instruments (V. 28. 6). Science of midwifery seems to have been considerably developed as it is stated that during Rāma's reign women gave birth to babies without any risk (*aroga-prasavā nāryaḥ*, VII. 41. 19).

What is the mother's contribution to the building of the personality of a baby? According to a popular proverb, sons take after the father, daughters after the mother. Sumantra exemplified this by the instance of Kaikeyī who, in her selfish insistence on her "pound of flesh," only instinctively followed the nature of her mother (II. 35. 28, 17-8). Confirming this, there was another saying that human beings in respect of character do not take at all after their fathers but only after their mothers (III. 16. 34). Even on the physical plane, mother plays a vital part in procreation; father being merely an instrumental cause (II. 108. 11).

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : *op. cit.*, p. 171.

Motherly love in its purest form is symbolized in the Rāmāyaṇa by the love of cow for her calf (II. 74. 15-28). Kausalyā declared that she would follow Rāma to the forest even as an enfeebled cow follows her calf (II. 20. 54; 24. 9). She likens her condition, separated from her darling son, to a cow bereft of her offspring (II. 20. 53). The queens of Daśaratha's harem, wailing over Rāma's departure for the forest, were like so many cows bereaved of their young ones (II. 41. 7). Rāma hurrying towards the forest, under obligations of *dharma*, could not well observe his mother, like unto a young calf bound by the strings (II. 40. 40). Sometimes, the relation of a mare and her colt is employed to depict maternal love (II. 20. 20).

Mothers goaded their sons to outrival their step-brothers. Rāvaṇa's victorious career was chalked out for him by his ambitious mother, Kaikasī. She instigated him to become a peer of his splendid half-brother, Vaiśravaṇa. She continued to advise him, to the very last years of his life, when she is said to have addressed him and his ministers in the Council Chamber in well-worded phrases, urging him to restore Sītā to Rāma and make peace with him (VI. 34. 20-3).

Mother occupied a high pedestal of honour and love in the estimation of her sons. She was the centre of family life. A son, even unwittingly causing grief to his mother, considered himself wretched : which is clearly shown in Rāma's lamentations in the forest for his helpless grieving mother. In Rāma we have the example of an ideal son who is as considerate and respectful towards his step-mothers as towards his own mother. While instructing Sītā on her duties at home during his sojourn in the forest, he stressed that she was to serve all his step-mothers with equal devotion, since he regarded them all as his own (II. 26. 32).

A complex and interesting question dealt with in the epic is : Who, the husband or the son, should have greater claims on the righteous woman's solicitude? Of course, there is the glaring example of Kaikeyī who asserts on behalf of her son, oblivious of mortal grief caused thereby to her husband. But her conduct is most trenchantly condemned in the epic (II. 35-6). Citizens of Ayodhyā deem her carried away by the lust for power—a lust that egged her to disregard her lord—and they resolve not to stay in the kingdom as long as she lived (II. 33. 21-6). Kausalyā, too, in her overpowering love for Rāma wishes to follow him to the forest, leaving behind her aged husband (II. 24. 9); but Rāma dissuades her, saying : "When the righteous king is still alive and is following the path of his duty, how can you, like any senseless widow, go forth from here with me ?" (II. 21. 61). Husband, says he, is the god and lord of a woman, and his abandonment is the cruellest sin a woman can commit (II. 24. 21, 12). Sumantra scolds Kaikeyī for despising her husband for the sake of her son's welfare, and declares that to a woman her husband's wish should ever have a preference over her own "in the matter of having crores of sons" (II. 35. 8; 39. 40). Widowed Tārā prefers embracing the burning limbs of her dead husband to living with even sons like Aṅgada (IV. 21. 13).

THE WIDOW

From what has been seen of the relations expected to exist between man and wife, it will be readily noticed that *vaidhvya* or widowhood was the greatest calamity that could befall a woman. Death of husband, however, did not mean an end to the widow's life too. The custom of *satī*, or self-immolation by the widow on the husband's pyre, has little sanction in the Rāmāyaṇa. None of the wives of Daśaratha or Rāvaṇa are represented as joining their husbands on the pyre. At the death of Daśaratha, Kausalyā, in her lamentations exclaims that as a *pativratā*, she would enter the burning fire embracing the corpse of her husband under cremation; but *vyāvahārikas* or persons well-versed in worldly conduct get her removed from the scene (II. 66.12-3). This clearly shows that the practice of *satī*, though not totally unheard of, was not accorded social sanction and was not generally viewed with favour. Again, Daśaratha, in asking Kaikeyī to rule over the kingdom as a *vidhavā* after his death (II. 12. 93), did not evidently envisage her turning a *satī*.

In the Uttarakāṇḍa, however, an allusion to self-immolation by widows is made : Vedavatī relates to Rāvaṇa the story of her mother who gave herself up to the flames along with her husband, Kuśadhvaja (VII. 17. 14). This is perhaps the only example of an actual *satī* in the entire epic. But some scholars are inclined to regard this story as more legendary than historical.[1] Besides, this solitary piece of evidence becomes unreliable in view of the several occasions the epic has for mentioning *satī* but does not. As a rule, women in the Rāmāyaṇa refrain from suicide, although they generally threaten to kill themselves when in despair.

Among Aryan widows the question of their re-marriage did not normally arise in view of the solemnity and irrevocability of the marital tie in life as well as in death, here and hereafter. The passage in the Araṇyakāṇḍa, where Sītā suspects that Lakṣmaṇa wants Rāma to die so that he (Lakṣmaṇa) may himself get her for his wife (III. 45. 6), is believed by some scholars to presuppose a widow's re-marriage with her brother-in-law as a matter of course, the younger brother taking the widowed wife of the elder.[2] But this surmise is without substantial evidence, and an Aryan widow is everywhere shown as leading a bereaved existence throughout her life. In fact, whenever as Indian poet has to depict forlornness of any particular being or object, his apt standard of comparison is—widow (V. 26. 25-6).

Among the Vānaras, however, prevalence of widow-remarriage must be accepted as a matter of fact. Tārā, at the death of Vālī, bewails her widow's lot, but, after Vālī is cremated, the new king Sugrīva makes her his wife and forthwith showers love on her (IV. 29. 4). She, too, seems to be most tenderly attached to her husband's slayer and even takes on herself a difficult mission. Her son is not pleased with the new alliance, but blames only the uncle (IV. 55. 3). That here the wife of the dead foe fell as natural booty to the conqueror is probably a reflection on a crude custom surviving in the age. But it should not be ignored that, though Tārā was entrusted to the care of Sugrīva, her son, Aṅgada, too had a special right to protection from his uncle, for Tārā did not undertake to bring up Aṅgada (IV. 21. 14). This fact goes to indicate that among the Vānaras a widow had no hold over the property or children of her husband. Moreover, the custom of marrying a widow did not extend to the elder brother. It was an offence if the elder brother lived with his younger brother's wife and it was for this offence that Vālī had to pay the penalty with his life (IV. 18. 18-9).

Among the Rākṣasas of lax morals, widows generally found another mate, whether through regular marriage or promiscuity. Thus, Śūrpaṇakhā, sister of Rāvaṇa and widow of Vidyujjihva, passionately appealed to Rāma to wed her (III. 17. 25). Rāvaṇa had also forcibly introduced into his harem several beautiful women after slaying their husbands (VI. 111. 64; VII. 24. 2, 19).

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1. A. S. Altekar : *op. cit.*, p. 142.
2. J. J. Meyer : *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, vol . ii. p. 436, footnote 1.

It would be pertinent to refer here to the general attitude of the people towards widows in ancient India. Although debarred from a second marriage and left to waste herself in lifelong suffering, a widow was in other respects an object of affection and regard in her own house. The widow having a child had something to live for—and gladly (VI. 48. 21; IV. 21. 4, 11). She was, as a general rule, treated with respect and consideration in the family. The widowed queens of Daśaratha led an honourable existence, receiving profuse courtesy and reverence at the hands of their sons and daughters-in-law, and they lived a comfortable life ever after in the royal palace.

There is no evidence to indicate that the presence of a widow was held undesirable on auspicious or festive occasions. Among those who welcomed Rāma on his return from exile were his widowed mothers, and Rāma duly offered his respects to them (VI. 127. 49-50). They received obeisance also from Sugrīva and other Vānara chiefs (VI. 128. 44). Sītā's toilet for the coronation ceremony was carefully executed by her mothers-in-law (VI. 128. 17). Even in the Uttarakāṇḍa, no feeling of repugnance for widows participating in auspicious functions is noticeable.

THE PURDĀ

Another aspect of woman's life in the Rāmāyaṇa is the prevalence of a mild form of *purdā*. It appears that seclusion of women had assumed the form of a recognized social custom. When Sītā sets out with her husband for the forest, through public thoroughfares, regret is expressed by Vālmīki that "a lady, who had so far not been seen even by the spirits of the sky, should now become an object of public gaze" (II. 33. 8). This implies that royal ladies did not ordinarily leave precincts of the palace in order to avoid curious gaze of all and sundry.

This practice of seclusion was, however, not insisted upon in emergencies like the outbreak of a war, a *svayaṁvara*, sacrifices and marriages. These are the only occasions in the Rāmāyaṇa when women are found moving about freely in public (VI. 114. 28).

Women, however, did not put on a veil when they came out in public. When Kausalyā, Sumitrā and Kaikeyī go out to Citrakūṭa for inducing Rāma to return to Ayodhyā, they are shown as going in open chariots, and there is no mention here of any veil (II. 83. 6). Sītā, too, is not described as perplexedly covering her face with a veil even when she had become an object of observation by commoners.

In the inner apartments of the household, no *purdā* was observed by the younger ladies of the family in the presence of elders of either sex. There is no suggestion anywhere in the epic that a father-in-law could not see the face of his daughter-in-law or that a son in company of his wife could not go to see his father or mother—as is the custom now in certain parts of Northern India. On the eve of his departure for the forest, Rāma, along with his wife, went to bid adieu to his father (II. 33. 1).

Among the Vānaras, too, no evidence is available about the observance of *purdā*. When Lakṣmaṇa went to Sugrīva's palace to reprimand him for his neglect of duty, Tārā appeared before him without any veil (IV. 33. 38) and ably pleaded Sugrīva's case before him. All the same, the practice of keeping women secluded in the harem of the palace fully obtained among the Vānaras. The royal *antaḥpura* at Kiṣkindhā was a sequestered and well-guarded place into which admittance was reserved for a selected few. When Sugrīva, seated in the female quarters of his palace, summoned his attendants, only those Vānaras "who could be allowed to present themselves before the females" were allowed entry (IV. 38. 8).

The observance of the *purdā*, or *avaguṇṭhana* (VI. 111. 62), can be definitely proved to have been in vogue among the Rākṣasas on the basis of a statement of Mandodarī, wife of Rāvaṇa. Rāvaṇa done to death in the battle, his queens surrounding his corpse gave up themselves to lamentations in the course of which Mandodarī burst out: "Why do you not get angry, beholding me, having put off my veil, walk out on foot by the city gate ? Do you behold your wives who have thrown off their veils. Why are you not angry seeing them all come out of the city ?" (VI. 111. 61-3). This indicates that men-folk among the Rakṣasas insisted on observance of *purdā* by their women. Incidentally, it is also brought to light that high-class Rākṣasa ladies were never allowed to come out of their inner apartments on foot like common women. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Vibhīṣaṇa, evidently prompted by the practice of *purdā* prevailing in his community, taking due precautions in presenting Vaidehī before Rāma. He first sent information to Sītā through female attendants and then presented himself before her. (It is worth noting that Sītā did not observe *purdā* before Vibhīṣaṇa and freely conversed with him.) He then made her ascend a palanquin which was borne by carefully selected Rākṣasa carriers and brought her to Rāma. Here Vibhīṣaṇa, who is described as pious and versed in rules of decorum (*dharma-vit*), in order to make that spot sufficiently sequestered, got the people cleared out of it. His attendants, canes in hand, began to move about driving away the crowd (VI. 114. 8-23). All this must have been in accord with the Rākṣasa custom of keeping their womenfolk veiled, as far as possible, from the glances of commoners.

But Rāma was a social reformer who protested against the procedure adopted by Vibhīṣaṇa. He administered a stern rebuke to him for meting out such insulting treatment to his erstwhile copartisans in the battle of Laṅkā. "They are all my men;" said he, "do not hurt their feelings by driving them out of this place. Neither houses, nor raiment, nor the circumscribed space of a seraglio, nor the etiquette of courts nor any other kingly ceremonial, can veil a woman from the gaze of others ; the only veil of a woman is her virtue. There is no sin consequent upon seeing women in danger, in difficulty, in a war or a *svayaṁvara*, at a sacrifice or marriage. Sītā is now in great danger and difficulty ; there is no sin in seeing her, especially in my presence" (VI. 114. 24-30).

These remarks of Rāma bring out clearly that a woman's observance of the *purdā* before strangers indicated her suspicion of their *bona fides*, that she could discard her veil in the presence of her husband's confidants, that in company of her husband she could be observed without incurring any breach of propriety, and that *purdā* need not pester a woman's freedom of movement in extraordinary and trying circumstances. Above all, Rāma, by stressing virtuous conduct as the only bastion of a woman's chastity, expresses inefficacy of veil in so far as it is regarded as a device to safeguard a woman's virtue by shielding her from the sinful glances (*duṣṭa cakṣu*, VI. 115. 20) of ruffians and loafers. The citizens, too, believed that women's protection rests mainly on their own inner strength of character (*dārāḥ cāritra-rakṣitāḥ*, II. 45. 25).

COURTEZANS

The Rāmāyaṇa furnishes a definite instance, first in the history of Indian civilization, of royal recognition and prevalence of prostitution. The remedy suggested for drought in the kingdom of Romapāda was to entice Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, son of sage Vibhāṇḍaka, from his *āśrama* into the kingdom. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was an unsophisticated hermit youth, ignorant of pleasures ensuing from contact with women. Hence, it was so concocted that he should be allured "by the help of things agreeably ministering to the senses and ravishing the soul." The *purohita* (of Romapāda) suggested that courtezans of comely presences and clad in ornaments should be honoured and sent to lure the young ascetic. The actual task of selection and despatch of the courtezans was entrusted to the ministers. This indicates that even people placed in high and respectable positions knew details about courtezans, and that the latter were officially connected with the royal court (I. 9-10).

State etiquette of the period, and proverbial Indian fondness for pageantry, necessitated employment of a large retinue of courtezans and nautch girls as escorts of honour. It should be remembered, however, that these ladies were quite distinct from common prostitutes, and that their services were requisitioned in all royal festivities. When Rāma was to be consecrated as crown prince, Vasiṣṭha directed preparations to be made for the purpose, among which was a band of well-decked dancing girls drawn up within the second apartment of the royal palace (II. 14. 39; 3. 17-8). That the courtezans were not considered inauspicious is clear from the fact that, when Rāma returned to Ayodhyā from his exile in the forest, Bharata ordered a host of *gaṇikās* to go out to accord him a fitting reception (VI. 127. 3-5). These women were, indeed, an indispensable part of any expedition and were associated with the camp followers of the royal army. Daśaratha ordered Sumantra to mobilize a magnificent fourfold force to accompany Rāma to the forest which should consist, among others, of sweet-tongued courtezans (II. 36. 3). That is, courtezans *were* patronized and *employed* in service by the royalty.

The *veśyās*, or strumpets, were not only a camp's ornament but also an integral part of civil life. Ayodhyā is described as abounding in excellent courtezans (*gaṇikāvara-śobhitām*, II. 51. 21). Common prostitutes were known as *rūpājīvāḥ*, or women living by their beauty (II. 36. 3). Though the epic is generally silent about the manner in which they practised their trade, art of seduction played by harlots on Ṛṣyaśṛṅga is sufficiently indicative of the wiles and crafts employed by them (I. 10). Music and dance as ever were universally cultivated among them. Alluring adornment, excellent attirement, voluptuous singing, sweet talk, tender embraces, savoury viands and all the coquettish paraphernalia of the art of captivating men were employed with dexterity by "these earthly lieutenants of the unembodied god of love," making them eminently befitting as "decoys" to tempt and lure even harmless, pious sages.

CHAPTER X

WOMAN IN SOCIETY

Theoretically, woman was never an individual capable of taking care of herself; she was to be subject to her husband, son or other relatives (II. 61. 24). But this should not be construed to mean that she was eternally enchained in household captivity. Women were allowed to take part freely in (religious) ceremonies, shows and entertainments. At such gatherings, they showed themselves in all their finery. On festive occasions, when the city wore a gala appearance, with music playing and bards and minstrels swelling the jostling crowds, dancing girls and lovely maidens were invariably present to lend colour and gaiety to the occasion (II. 15. 8, 12; 3. 17).

Men, women and children of the metropolis of Ayodhyā are shown as eagerly looking forward to the proposed coronation ceremony of Rāma. Rāma's palace was filled with joyous men and women, evidently assembled to felicitate him (II. 5. 19, 14). The entire city turned out to acclaim and applaud the heir-apparent, women contributing largely to the ovation. As the crown prince drives through the royal thoroughfare, gay with banners and buntings, thousands of women, in colourful garbs and ornaments, are described as occupying the terraces and standing behind lattices of the houses on either side, showering fragrant flowers on him. Women also stand thickly crowded on the roads, and they, as also those from the house-tops, greet the prince, singing his praises as well as those of his mother and wife (II. 16. 37-42).

A more spectacular participation of women in public gaieties is witnessed on the occasion of the festal welcome given to Rāma on his return from exile. Entire city of Ayodhyā repairs to Nandigrāma. Swarms of soldiers and their wives, bards and minstrels, lay women, queens of royal household—along with the townsmen—rush out to welcome Rāma. The queens of Daśaratha are driven there in chariots. All wayside from Nandigrāma to Ayodhyā is festally decked. Shouts of welcome ring out from the citizens at the arrival of Rāma. Sītā and the Vānara ladies have their toilet performed by the widowed wives of Daśaratha. Embellishing themselves with the choicest ornaments, they curiously go out to behold the festal beauty of the city. Lovely maidens are at the forefront of the procession in which Rāma splendidly drives to the royal capital. Brāhmaṇa maidens present fruits to the prince, after circumambulating him, on the roads. Maidens also take part in anointing him as king on the coronation day (VI. 127-8).

Then, in the great sacrifices performed by kings, all kinds of people streamed in and made merry, and women guests too came and regaled themselves with dainty dishes. At Daśaratha's Aśvamedha sacrifice, hosts of men and women coming from different countries were well entertained with food and drink (I. 14. 16, 13). *Dvijas* along with their wives were invited from different countries to Rāma's Aśvamedha held on the banks of the Gomatī. Actors, dancers, youthful women, queen-mothers, ladies of the princes, besides hosts of other men-folk, all went from Ayodhyā to attend the memorable sacrifice in the Naimiṣa forest. At the sacrifice, Vibhīṣaṇa, surrounded by ladies, performed the worship of the high-souled sages (VII. 91).

And, in other ways too, women did not keep aloof from the world and its joys. They were included among camp followers of the army. Serving girls (*cetīs*), courtezans (*rūpājīvāḥ*), soldiers' wives (*vadhvaḥ*) and actors with their women accompanied the forces to minister to the pleasure of the fighters (II. 91. 64 ; 36. 3 ; 83. 15). An idea of the revelry and merry-making that prevailed in an armed camp—how women took a major part in the entertainment of the soldiers—can be gleaned from the description of encampment of Bharata's army at Bharadvāja's hermitage (II. 91).

The men-folk generally took their wives along with them on journeys, picnics and visits to kinsfolk and friends. The wife was not relegated to an unimportant position in matters vitally affecting the husband. She was his *krīḍā-sahāya* (VI. 111. 63)—his companion in sports and in his pleasure rambles over hills and dales, parks and woods (VI. 111.32; IV. 1. 96 ; V. 20. 36 ; 24. 35-6; II. 67. 19). Here, more than in any other sphere, women joined their men in the perfect abandon. In the vales of the Vindhyas, reverberating with the waterfalls of the Narmadā, Rāvaṇa witnessed all manner of beings, human and semi-divine, sporting and dallying with their sweethearts (VII. 31. 16-7). Women were also allowed full opportunities for recreation, either alone or in company of their lady-friends. Indeed, they enjoyed light and air, the two blessings of nature abundantly.

On the testimony of the Uttarakāṇḍa, women, as much as men, who had to prefer a complaint in the royal court of justice, had the right of free audience with the king (VII. 53. 5).

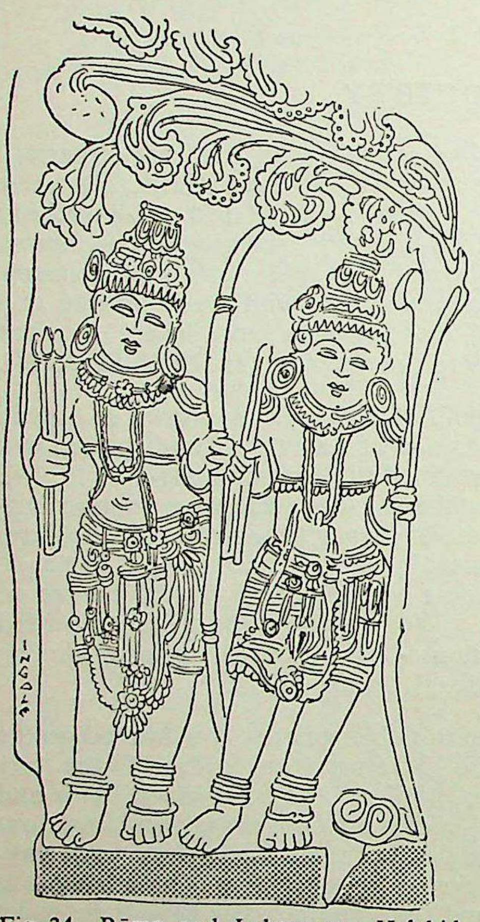

Fig. 34. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa ; Helebid, Kedārāśvar Temple, twelfth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

It is remarkable that, throughout the epic, there is no suggestion that the presence of a young lady like Sītā in the austere *āśramas* was taken as anything unusual or embarrassing for either the *āśramites* or herself. Rāma introduced his wife to the great savant Bharadvāja and his pupils, and she was solemnly received and entertained at the *āśrama* and escorted to her seat in the midst of all the *munis* and hosts of students (II. 54. 10-14, 17-20, 33, 35). She appeared with her husband before Śarabhaṅga in the altar-hall of the sage's *āśrama* and was welcomed by him and offered seats along with her companions (III. 5. 25-6). On their arrival at Agastya's hermitage, Lakṣmaṇa introduced Sītā also to one of the hermits and asked him to announce each one of them to his master (III. 12. 1-2, 4). Agastya subsequently received Sītā along with his pupils and eulogized her conduct before all, saying that she would adorn any *āśrama* she resided in (III. 12. 25-7 ; 13. 1-8). In fact, in the mixed company of every hermitage, Sītā was free and unreserved. She was respected by the inmates of all the *āśramas* where for ten years she enjoyed pleasant sojourn (III. 11. 22, 26-7).

Life in these *āśramas* seems to have developed Sītā into a sturdy woman. She had regular outings with Rāma at the Citrakūṭa *āśrama*, and their fatiguing hill-side excursions often ended in a hot repast of roasted meat (II. 96. 1-2). One year's outdoor life was enough to shake off from Sītā any courtly timidity she may have cultivated at Ayodhyā, it required courage in a young lady to feel safe and happy in continued residence at a monastery like Citrakūṭa, practically vacated by its inmates out of fear of the Rākṣasas whom Rāma had incensed (II. 116). After twelve years of hard country life, she was no longer a clinging, delicate and helpless wife, but a brave and self-reliant woman. While Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were busy setting up an *āśrama*-settlement at Pañcavaṭī, Sītā lived under the guardianship of an old friend of her husband's family, Jaṭāyu (III. 43. 51 ; 14. 36), with whom she developed a daughterly familiarity. When Jaṭāyu was disabled in battle by Rāvaṇa, she bewailed her friend and embraced him (III. 52. 1A). That she had grown perfectly self-possessed in the presence of strangers is evident from the fact of her receiving the stranger Rāvaṇa, disguised as a mendicant, in her forest-dwelling, and entertaining him as a guest. Not in the least upset by his indecent suggestions and approaches, she kept up an easy conversation with him as any hostess well-grounded in etiquette (III. 46-7). And along with a strong mind she seems to have developed a strong physique as well, for the mighty Rāvaṇa had to use considerable physical force at every step to drag her along for preventing her escape.[1]

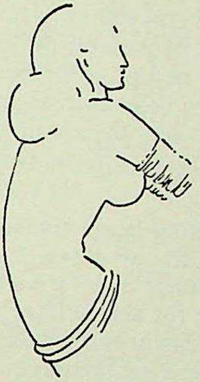

Fig. 35. *Kubjā*.

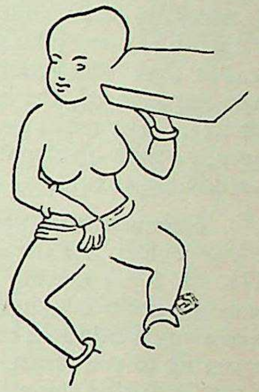

Fig. 36. *Vāmanikā* (dwarf-girl); Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

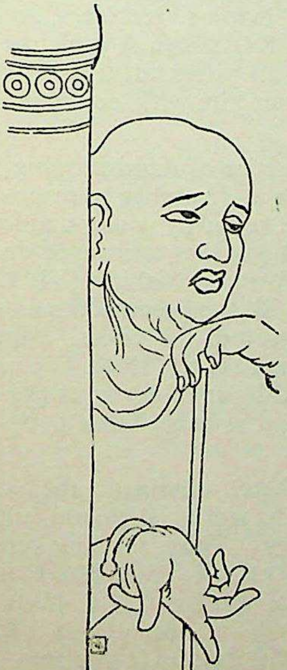

Fig. 37. A *kañcukin* puzzled ; Ajaṇṭā, fifth century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

It is thus clear that women of the higher circles, especially those belonging to the warrior nobility with which the epic is naturally most concerned, enjoyed no small measure of freedom.

However, we must not fail to take note of some other factors which tended to reduce woman to the position of a mere chattel. The existence of the harem was an inevitable corollary of the widespread practice of polygamy, which in turn led to enchainment of scores of women to a single individual. The harem was closely guarded by a large battalion of female door-keepers (II. 10. 20), hunch-backed (fig. 35) and dwarf-women (II. 10. 13 ; fig. 36), and by eunuchs (II. 65. 7), in turn controlled by the superintendents of the harem (who were generally old-men wearing orange-coloured robes, *kañcukins*, carrying canes in their hands and exercising great authority over the female warders, II. 16. 3; fig. 37). But it should be noted that this practice, of keeping the royal harem well guarded, had come forth as a result of notions of prestige, respectability and high breeding associated with aristocratic families, as well as of the necessity to prevent the entry within of unauthorized persons, mischief-mongers or agents of enemy kings. Moreover, the cult of polygamy itself was only a royal custom that was generally accepted without offence in the general social system. Even sequestered, the harem fully catered to the comfort and happiness of its women inmates. The royal queens had their separate palaces with private parks, and were equipped with diverse means of amusement where they lived a gilded existence in overflowing luxury.[1]

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[1] III. 53. 26 ; 49. 22 ; 52. 6-9 ; see S. C. Sarkar : *Educational Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, pp. 66-70

The custom of presenting beautiful women, as a gift, is found time and again in the epic. Beautiful *dāsīs* or slave-girls were presented to Rāma as a tribute (VII. 39. 10). During Daśaratha's *śrāddha* ceremony, Bharata bestowed maid-servants, upon Brāhmaṇas, for the welfare of the departed spirit (II. 77. 3). Janaka gave away a hundred maidens at the nuptials of his daughter, Sītā (I. 74. 5). Before departing to the forest, Rāma conferred several female servants on a Vedic preceptor of the Taittirīya school (II. 32. 15-6).

The gift of a wife was deemed a highly meritorious act. Tārā, widow of Vālī, implored Rāma to despatch her to heaven to enable her to join her husband, saying that there could be no gift equal to the gift of a wife (IV. 24. 38). That is why as messenger's fee, Bharata gave Hanumān, who brought the news of Rāma's home-coming, sixteen well-conducted, earring-decked girls to be the latter's wives—gold-complexioned, marked with lovely noses and thighs, moon-sweet faces, and with every kind of ornament and noble birth (VI. 125. 44-5). Kārtavīrya Arjuna, the King of Māhiṣmatī, placed himself, his kingdom, his sons and his wives at the service of the exalted sage, Pulastya, and entreated him to favour him with commandments (VII. 33. 12).

The opulence of the age was responsible for the practice of requisitioning young maid-servants for men's bathing and toilet services. Princes and nobility were massaged, bathed, rubbed with fragrant sandal paste, dressed and undressed by young maidens. At the termination of the battle of Laṅkā, Vibhīṣaṇa told Rāma that lotus-eyed damsels, conversant with the art of decking, stood ready to perform his bathing (VI. 121. 3). At Bharadvāja's hermitage, each soldier of Bharata was allotted several females who massaged his body with oil, bathed him on the lovely banks of the rivers, wiped his body, pressed his legs and offered him heady drink to quaff (II. 91. 53-4). The relaxing arms of Rāma are spoken of as being pressed and decked by maid-servants (VI. 21. 3), and he is described as lying down on pleasant couches and as being fanned by many a delicate and fair hand (II. 42. 15).

At the performance of Aśvamedha sacrifices, there obtained the curious practice of kings offering their queens as part of the fee to sacrificial priests, although the offer could be redeemed by the payment of money. Thus, the four queens of Daśaratha were given away as wages to the four priests (I. 14. 35). Thereafter, the king redeemed or ransomed his wives by the gift of money (I. 14. 43-9). This shows that the practice of actually making over the queens to the priests had been reduced to a mere formal offer ; nevertheless, the formality held in it the seed of the existence of the concept of woman as chattel in later times.

The order of women belonging to the servile and venal classes (*dāsīs* and *gaṇikās*), and the belief about Apsarās receiving the departed heroes in the next world with the joys of love, tended to reduce woman to the undistinguished position of being an instrument of sensual pleasure (*indriyārtha*). The open-handed and unabashed abduction of numerous maidens by the sex-mad Rākṣasas (V. 20. 5), the flirting attitude of the gods of heaven towards earthly women and King Daṇḍa's ravishment of the glorious Arajā instead of seeking her as a wife from her father—are instances showing in what grave danger the dignity and honour of women stood at the hands of the rakes and ruffians of society.

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[1] *Cf.* the description of Kaikeyī's palace (II. 10. 12-6).

Even Rāma, in his utterances, at times hints that a woman could be relegated to a position of no account in extraordinary circumstances, no scope being allowed to her for exercising her free will. He tells Kaikeyī that at his father's behest he would gladly hand over to Bharata even his wife, Sītā (II. 19. 7). At another place, he seems to suggest that wife is an unimportant object (meant only for the pleasure of the senses) that can be easily procured. On the battle-field of Laṅkā, when his brother, Lakṣmaṇa, is seriously wounded, Rāma exclaims : "In all places a wife can be found, and in all places 'kinsmen' by marriage ; but I do not see a place where one could find a lost brother too" (VI 101. 14). Later, he is prepared to abandon without any qualms the supposedly defiled Sītā for fear of public scandal (VII. 45. 14-5).

Thus, woman was generally treated as a sort of property, the owner having naturally the authority do what he liked with her. Rāvaṇa bracketed his wives with such property as food, articles of luxury, clothes, house, city or country (VII. 34. 41). The reference by Sītā to *śailūṣas* (actors) handing over their wives for others' use again shows man as a woman's lord, free and not too tender towards her (II. 30. 8). Like property, woman had to be constantly protected and guarded (II. 100. 49); complete independence was never her right. "The first refuge of a woman is her husband, second the son, third the relations ; no fourth she has" (II. 61. 24). A wife and her sons are declared by Rāma to be under the restraint of their elders (II. 101. 18). The woman's *yogakṣema* (maintenance and protection) rested completely on the diligent vigil of man (II. 53. 3). Since continuity of the family line was considered to be the main object of taking a wife (VII. 3. 4), it was a husband's duty to guard his wife carefully; for not well-guared, she might bring disgrace to the family (III. 50. 7-8; VII. 9. 11).

The concept of woman as chattel is, however, more than counterpoised by the respect and concern the society had for the fair sex. It insisted on a properly regulated and complaisant behaviour towards women. They enjoyed precedence in mounting chariots, boats and other vehicles. When Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā left for the forest in a chariot, Sītā took seat first and then the brothers ascended the car (II. 40. 16). Similarly, when the party crossed the Gaṅgā, Rāma made Sītā first ascend the raft by taking her by the hand ; and, then, himself took his seat (II. 52. 76). Women were usually seated in front, in chariots (II. 43. 12).

Prostration was a usual method of paying one's respects to royal ladies adopted by subjects and attendants. Before accosting Sītā in the Aśokavāṭikā at Laṅkā, Hanumān first prostrated himself and then addressed her with *añjali-bandha* (folded palms, V. 33. 1-2). Vibhīṣaṇa humbly joined his hands at the forehead before addressing Sītā VI. 114. 9). The queen-mother was offered *añjali* salutes by the subjects (II. 12. 48). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, the complaisant conduct shown by Vālmīki towards the discarded Sītā shows how even the hermit order was in no way wanting in regard for the fair sex (VII. 49).

The wife of the eldest brother was regarded as equal in status to one's mother, and the younger brothers habitually bowed at her feet. Lakṣmaṇa daily bowed at the feet of Sītā (IV. 6, 23). Bharata offered his respects to Sītā by bowing to her when she returned with her husband from exile (VI. 127. 41). When Sītā, in the forest, branded Lakṣmaṇa with the stigma of having a lustful desire for her, the self-controlled Lakṣmaṇa, with folded hands, told her that she was but a veritable goddess for him and, therefore, he dared not answer (III. 45. 28).

It was in bad taste to present oneself abruptly before ladies of high rank. That is why Vibhīṣaṇa, carrying Rāma's message to Sītā after the battle of Laṅkā, first announced his presence through female attendants (VI. 114. 8). The tinkling sounds of women's ornaments in Sugrīva's harem prevented the well-bred Lakṣmaṇa from proceeding further. Stepping aside, he twanged his bow-string to announce his arrival (IV. 33. 25-7). Though the necessity of guarding women is constantly urged in the Rāmāyaṇa, it is emphasized that force should not be used to control them (II. 100. 28). Giving vent to one's indignation, or flying into a rage, in the presence of ladies was considered unmannerly (IV. 33. 39).

Staring at women was a breach of etiquette avoided by highbred men. Lakṣmaṇa, on seeing Tārā in disorder, hung down his head, conducting himself like an ascetic (IV. 33. 39) But it was conceded that for the nobility to behold others' wives in a friendly spirit was not improper (IV. 33. 61).

When men and women walked together, men went first—with women following. Vālmīki, while conducting the deserted Sītā to his hermitage, walks in front of her (VII. 49. 14). It is believed that Lakṣmaṇa never looked Sītā in the face (IV. 6. 22-3). When Sītā, banished to the forest by Rāma, asks Lakṣmaṇa to behold the signs of pregnancy manifest in her in order to impress upon him her utterly forlorn condition, Lakṣmaṇa replies : "Up to this time I have never seen any portion of thy beautiful person except thy feet. This is a solitary forest, and, besides, the worshipful Rāma is not present here. Under these circumstances, how can I cast my looks upon thee ?" (VII. 48. 19-22).

The moral code of the day condemned kidnapping of women. *Nārīcaurya* (abduction or seduction of women) was a despicable crime (VI. 111. 68; III. 50. 8; 53. 7-8). Vibhīṣaṇa pointed out to Rāvaṇa that contact with another's wife was infamous, sinful and destructive of wealth (VI. 9. 13-22). It was man's moral duty to protect from molestation others' wives as sedulously as his own (III. 50. 8; V. 21. 7). It was something inconceivable, as pointed out by Sītā to Rāvaṇa, that a king, who is expected to undertake the protection of his subjects, should debase himself by molestation of others' wives (III. 50. 6). Sītā asked Rāvaṇa to make himself an example and enjoy pleasures only with his own wives (V. 21. 8). A prince who hankered after the wives of others was punished with banishment (II. 72. 45). Ravishing a reluctant damsel (*a-kāmā*) was severely punished (VII. 26. 55-6).

Above all, woman was declared an *avadhyā* (never to be slain, II. 78. 21). He who killed a woman stood on a level with the slayer of a king, a child or an old man (II. 75. 37). Homicide of women (*strīvadha*) was a heinous crime (IV. 24. 37), inviting self-destruction, excusable amongst barbarians alone (VI. 81. 21, 19). Dreadful, therefore, is said to be the punishment, even after death, for such a hideous deed. Hanumān tried to dissuade Indrajit from slaughtering Sītā by warning him that women-slayers were led after death to regions which were shunned even by the perpetrators of the most abominable crimes in the world (VI. 81. 22).

Even where the killing of wicked women was found imperative because of their anti-social activities, the act was committed reluctantly : a disfiguring of them was preferred to taking their lives. Lakṣmaṇa cut off the ears and nose of Śūrpaṇakhā under Rāma's orders for her dastardly attack on Sītā (III. 18. 17-21; fig. 38). Sūrpaṇakhā told Rāvaṇa that Rāma let her escape with life as he was afraid of the sin of killing a woman (III. 34.12). Lakṣmaṇa cut off the ears, nose and breasts of the molesting demonness Ayomukhī (III. 69. 17). Rāma killed Tāṭakā very reluctantly, only when he was convinced that, for safeguarding the life and rituals of the sages, no course other than slaying the ogress had been left (I. 25. 15, 17). Viśvāmitra quoted two precedents to Rāma of woman-slaughter warranted by scriptures in the interests of humanity—*viz.*, of the killing of Bhṛgu's wife by Viṣṇu and of Mantharā, daughter of Virocana, by Indra (I. 25. 20-1).

When Laṅkinī, the presiding goddess of Laṅkā, challenged the entry of Hanumān into the Rākṣasa capital, the Vānara hero merely gave her a blow with his left fist, realizing that the sex of the opponent called for exercise of minimum force (V. 3. 40-1). Śatrughna was bent upon making short work of Mantharā, the malicious maid who had poisoned the ears of Kaikeyī, but Bharata asked him to pardon her because women were guaranteed immunity from death at the hands of all beings, and because he would moreover incur the keen displeasure of Rāma himself (II. 78. 21, 23). The same consideration prevented Bharata from killing his wicked mother who had wrought so much ruin on the Ikṣvāku family (II. 78. 21-2 ; 106. 9). Even Rāvaṇa, the greatest menace (of the age) to the chastity of women, was dissuaded from his plan of destroying Sītā on more than one occasion by the thought that it was unchivalrous to kill a woman (VI. 92. 59-60).

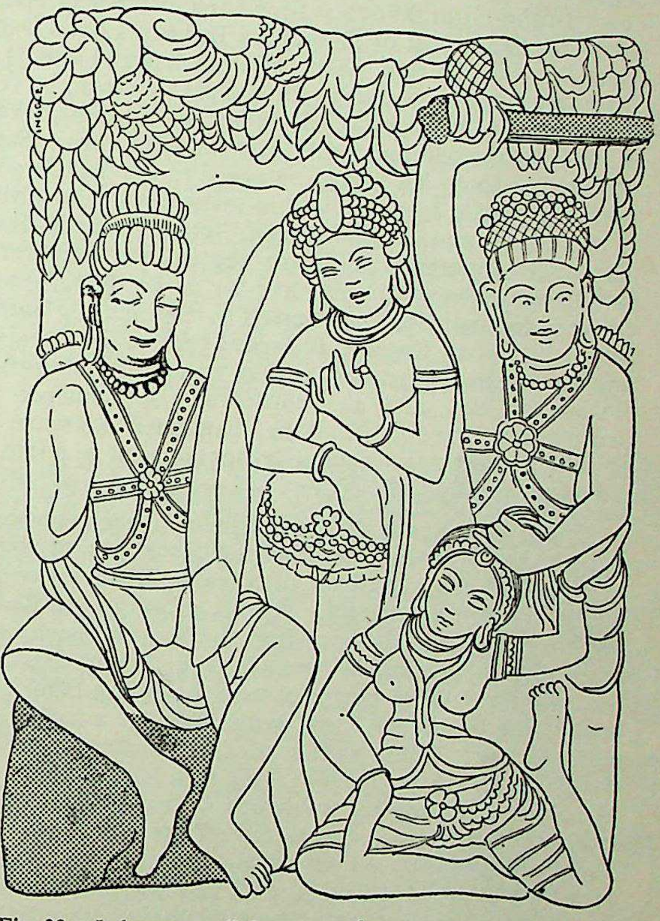

Fig. 38. Lakṣmaṇa disfiguring Śūrpaṇakhā; sculptures; Deogarh, fifth century A.D. (National Museum, Government of India).

It would be pertinent here to enquire into the attitude adopted by the Rāmāyana society towards women who were overtaken by the misfortune of falling into the clutches of ruffians and enemies. Such a situation alone would be the true criterion to judge the genuineness of the society's sympathy towards the weaker sex.[1] The Rāmāyaṇa contains scores of instances of forcibly raped or kidnapped women. Rāvaṇa had brought into his harem innumerable maidens and married damsels—from far and near—who had to yield to his brute force and who, it appears, had resigned themselves to their forlorn lot without any hope of deliverance (VII. 24. 16). The epic, however, does not throw any light on what happened to these captive women after the death of Rāvaṇa.

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[1] A. S. Altekar : *op. cit.*, p. 367.

In the Uttarakāṇḍa is found the instance of Arajā, daughter of sage Bhārgava, who excited the lust of Daṇḍa, an Ikṣvāku king. Daṇḍa accosted her while strolling alone in the *āśrama* park, courted her and almost won her ; but, even though she suggested proper procedure for a legal wedlock, he forcibly violated her. Thereafter he returned to his capital, Madhumanta, close by, while Arajā, weeping and terribly perturbed, awaited her father near the hermitage. Sage Bhārgava, who was apprised of the mishap by his pupils, returned to the hermitage raging and vowed the destruction of Daṇḍa's kingdom within seven days. Accordingly, the *āśrama* was vacated by all its inmates who, then, settled outside the limits of Daṇḍa's kingdom. The sage apparently did not regard his daughter as innocent and scolded her by calling her *durmedhā*, a pervert ; for, as he thought, was she not a party to Daṇḍa's crime in having submitted herself to and meekly borne the violence of a passion-mad prince ? Before leaving, Bhārgava commanded Arajā to stay alone at the hermitage and engage herself in purification penances. All prospects of marriage were evidently closed for her, and she consented, in obedience to her father's command, to do penitentiary rites for life at the abandoned Bhārgava *āśrama*. Bhārgava's treatment of his daughter is obviously tantamount to a father's discarding of his daughter violated forcibly (VII. 80-1).

The historically famous instance of such women, however, is Sītā's : abducted against her will by the libertine Rāvaṇa and kept in captivity in his palace for a year. After the overthrow of Rāvaṇa, Rāma refused to accept her back having grave doubts about her chastity. All his efforts to kill Rāvaṇa had been, he explains, only for the purpose of removing the ignominy and insult (to his family) consequent upon her being stolen away from his custody, and not for her sake (VI. 115. 15-6); for, said he : "What powerful man, born in a high family, would condescend to take back with assurance, and with longing, a wife who had gone and lived in another man's house? Thou wert carried by Rāvaṇa on his lap and beheld by him with sinful eyes. How can I, taking thee back, allow to bring disgrace upon my family ? My object has been accomplished with the chastisement of the Rākṣasas. I have re-established my fame and cleared off the stain which had for a time clouded my name. Therefore, go—I give thee leave—wherever thou wilt. I have nothing more to do with thee" (VI. 115. 13-24). Sītā in reply pointed out that, being in captivity, she was no master of her person ; she could command only her heart, and that, she tells, had always been faithful to him and to him alone (VI. 116. 8-9). This explanation did not convince Rāma, who accepted her only when her chastity had been openly vouched for by the Holy Fire (VI. 118. 5ff).

Contrary to this, there are several passages in the Rāmayaṇa which go to establish that Rāma wanted to recover Sītā not so much to avenge a wrong done to him as to restore to happiness a cherished wife whom he continued to love and honour intensely as ever for her voluntary resolution to share the miseries of the forest life (IV. 1. 103-9). On the eve of crossing the ocean for invading Laṅkā, he laments that he could not reach in time to respond to his wife's pathetic call for help at Pañcavaṭī and vents his deep longing to find peace of mind in her loving arms (VI 5. 7, 20). There is not the slightest hint given by Vālmīki that Rāma had any inclination to spurn his wife after the subjugation of Laṅkā because of her enforced sojourn in an alien's house. Therefore, the cruel vein in which he addresses Sītā when she is actually brought to his presence after the fall of Rāvaṇa is surprising.[1] But an explanation for this seemingly enigmatic conduct of his is provided when he gives out his mind at the end of Sītā's successful fire-ordeal : he explains that he had never doubted the unwavering faithfulness of his beloved wife, that he had always been convinced that a ruffian like Rāvaṇa dared not lay violent hands upon her, protected as she was by the armour of her chastity ; all the same, should he have taken her back without purifying her, people would dub him as lustful and forgetful of social morality (VI. 118. 14-7). Thus, ' it is the fear of public scandal that urges Rāma to profess his repudiation of Sītā and makes him put her to test" (fig. 39).

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[1] **A. S. Altekar : *op. cit.*, p. 369.**

The final abandonment of Sītā, as related in the Uttarakāṇḍa, again only confirms this fear of Rāma. Sītā's ordeal at Laṅkā is not sufficient to silence the public at Ayodhyā which is diehard in its prejudices against the restoration of an abducted woman to her former station. It refuses to judge women by an equitable standard. All over Rāma's kingdom, people find fault with him for having taken back his wife and for overlooking the fact that she has been placed by Rāvaṇa in his lap and long confined to the Aśoka grove open to the risks of ravishment. They fear that his (Rāma's) example may have an adverse effect on public morality in that they may also now have to brook dubious conduct of their own wives, for "subjects always follow in the footsteps of their kings." These slanderous rumours about Sītā are not a casual malicious talk by an individual or a few individuals, but is a general popular view.

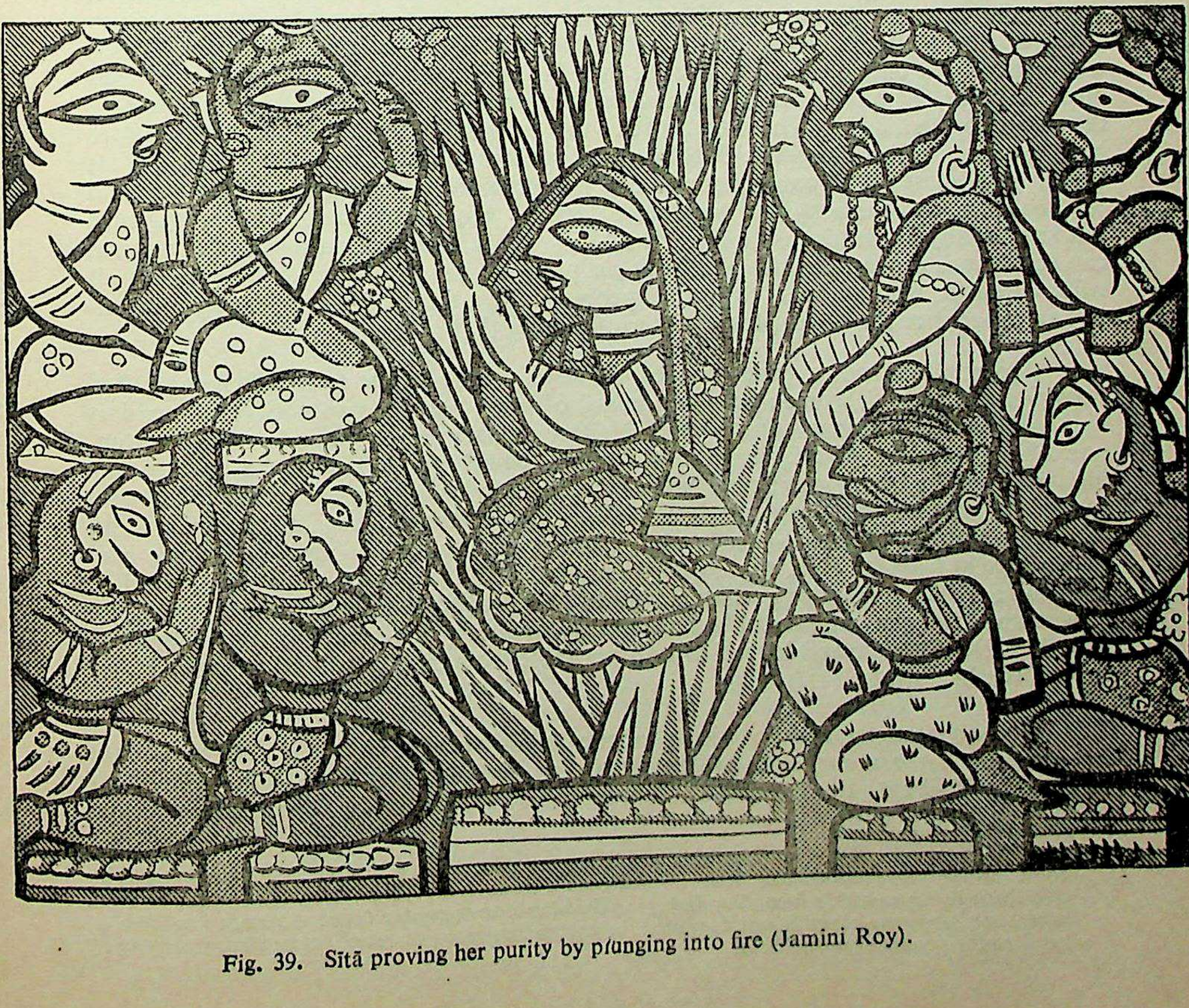

Fig. 39. Sītā proving her purity by plunging into fire (Jamini Roy).

Whether one goes into the streets of Ayodhyā or walks into the rural parts, that is the kind of thing the people say (VII. 43. 17-20). Rāma bows down before the force of public opinion, disregarding his inner conviction about Sītā's purity. Being too sensitive to allow the unsullied glory of his house to be tarnished for the sake of a wife, he banishes her for ever to the woods (VII. 45. 10-6). An opportunity is later allowed her to prove her purity in the assembly at Ayodhyā when she breaks down in the course of her pathetically appealing oaths and renounces her life (VII. 97).

Indian tradition has always commended this heavy self-denial on the part of Rāma, has looked with sympathetic interest on the struggle in his soul, and has even found proof of magnanimity in his action. The fault, if any, lies not so much in him as in the social tyranny of the age in which he lived. The society, whose opinion Rāma ventured not to flout in his regard for the highest kingly ideals, was too exacting and rigid in its attitude towards even supposedly besmirched women, and vehemently opposed any proposal or attempt to readmit them into its fold. Hindu law-givers, however, have refused to prescribe for average women this standard of purity.[1]

Now, we must turn to some of the misogynistic utterances in the epic which refer to the failings of women. Curiosity is an axiomatic female characteristic. When the urge to know something is awakened in the woman, she is lost to every consideration and her wish must be fulfilled, whatever the cost. Kaikeyī's father, who understood the voices of all beings, once laughed heartily at the call of a *jṛmbha* bird. At this, his queen, Kaikeyī's mother, was indignant and pressed him to disclose the reason of his laugh. The king told her that he would surely die if he explained to her the reason of his laughter. But the queen insisted on being told the reason of his laugh, regardless of the consequences. She was prepared even to give up her husband just because her curiosity had not been satisfied. Rightly, though, did the king turn out such a lady from his house (II. 35. 18-26). This irrational curiosity in a woman can sometimes degenerate into a polyandric passion, as in the case of Gautama's wife, Ahalyā, who consents to Indra's proposal for a secret romance, being inquisitive to experience the novel pleasure it would bring (I. 48. 19).

Again, stubbornness and dogged persistence are innate traits of the so-called weaker sex. Indeed, women possess a knack of brow-beating man with their whims and caprices admitting no compromise. Neither threats nor commands nor entreaties, nor abject prayers of the ageing Daśaratha, could move Kaikeyī to give up her insistence on the two boons; even when the grief-stricken king fell at her feet and prayed to her to withdraw her demands, she was adamant. Again, as soon as Sītā sees the wondrous phantom gazelle while picking flowers, she is curiously determined to acquire at least its skin, should Rāma not be able to capture it alive (III. 43. 19). Sītā said : "Such a headlong whim is held to be a dreadful thing and unbecoming of a woman. But the wonderful beauty of this creature fills me with astonishment" (III. 43. 21). Sītā showed herself to be a veritable woman, a common woman, in her love of the beautiful.

Woman's temper, and her biting tongue (*vajrasamā vāk*, II. 12. 53), are two more weapons in her armoury with which she asserts herself before men-folk. Hard and ruthless is Kaikeyī—dominating the harem life of Daśaratha by reason of her pride, haughty and fretful temper and pronounced hatred of her co-wives (II. 20. 44). Even the otherwise gentle Sītā is quite capable of blazing up in anger and speak harsh words; how hot she is against Lakṣmaṇa when he, faithful to Rāma's bidding, wishes to stay back by her and not go out seeking his brother who seems to be in danger of life and calling for help (III. 45).

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[1] *Cf.* Pārāśara (X. 21-2) who on the whole teaches that, when a woman has been enjoyed by force or by intimidation, she becomes clean again through certain fixed vows of mortification, and through her monthly flow. Similarly, the *Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa* (*prakṛtikhaṇḍa*, lxi, 79) also says that a woman raped is not degraded or excommunicated thereby, but can become pure by performing penance (*prāyaścitta*).

Vanity is another well-known characteristic of feminine nature. The artful Kaikeyī, who first bound the king with a solemn promise to grant her the stipulated boons (II. 10. 1-17) and then came out with her sinister objective (II. 11. 17-29), is termed as *vṛthā-paṇḍita-māninī*-one vainly pluming herself on her wisdom (II. 72. 47). Mantharā aroused and stirred up her vanity by reminding her of the immense influence she exerted on the King (II. 9. 24-6; fig. 41). There could be no more impassioned compliment to the vanity of a woman—to her overweening sense of self-importance—than the instance of Daśaratha addressing his sullen young queen after she makes her fateful demands (II. 10. 28-40).

It is often seen that a woman out of vanity throws a fling at the most vulnerable point of a man's nature—his manliness, his character, to just tempt and urge him on for complying with her wishes. Lakṣmaṇa manages to ignore for some time the entreaties of Sītā to go to Rāma's succour, but when Sītā's reproaches become atrocious and she charges him with the design of coveting his elder brother's wife as the only reason for his indifference to the protection of Rāma—a charge that "pierced his ears like a heated Nārāca (arrow)." Lakṣmaṇa, self-controlled though he was, could not put up with such brazen insinuations and departed to the aid of his brother (III. 45. 21-40). When Daśaratha was unwilling to grant Kaikeyī her two boons, she sarcastically remarked, that having installed Rāma on the throne, the king was just designing unchecked dalliance with her rival, Kausalyā (II. 12. 45). Rāma, in view of the dangers of forest life, had wanted to leave Sītā behind in Ayodhyā, but she taunted him by calling him a woman in man's guise (*striyaṁ puruṣa-vigraham*, II. 30. 3); and when he asked her to be devoted and obedient to Bharata in his absence (II. 26. 34, 26), she said instead that Rāma, in thus virtually leaving her to the tender mercies of Bharata, had fallen to the lowest depths of degradation. What difference was there, said she, between Rāma and an actor of low morals who is care-

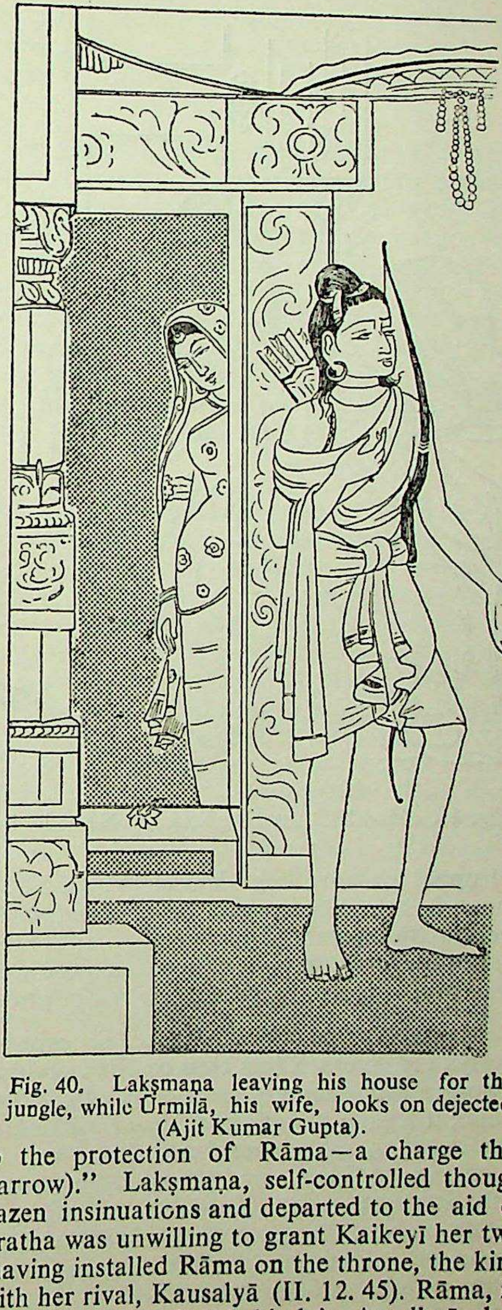

Fig. 40. Lakṣmaṇa leaving his house for the jungle, while Ūrmilā, his wife, looks on dejected (Ajit Kumar Gupta).

less about the custody and chastity of his wife whom he encourages to lead the life of a prostitute? (II. 30. 8). This is a highly mischievous taunt which one would perhaps like not to have been put in the mouth of Sītā.

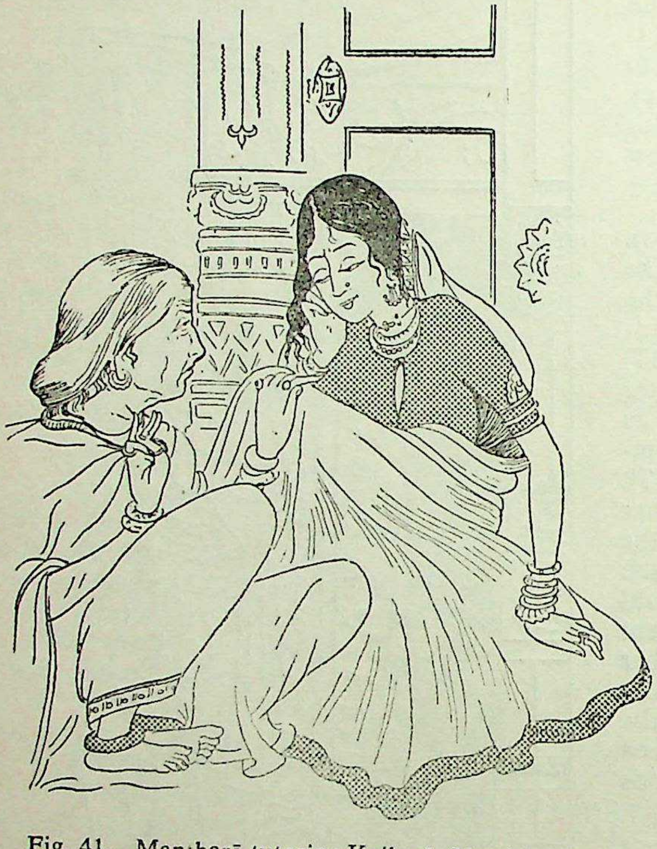

Fig. 41. Mantharā tutoring Kaikeyī (Nandalal Bose).

The adage "Frailty, thy name is woman !" is amply corroborated by several passages in the epic. Pessimism (*nairāśya*, VI. 64. 33) and levity of heart (*laghutva*, VI. 64. 33) are inseparable in a woman's nature. She could be easily beguiled or led astray by others (II. 12. 56). The delusion of Kaikeyī by Mantharā proves that woman is quite amenable to misguidance. The possibility is visualized, in the poem, everywhere of a woman being seduced by paramours by means of supplications and entreaties (V. 22. 2), by generous offers of the good things of life (VI. 64. 31), of song and music and dance (V. 20. 10), and by lavish praise of her beauty (III. 46. 16-31). The dismal prospect of woman's flighty youth and the consequent advisability of making the most of an evanescent existence was often impressed upon an unwilling damsel (V. 20. 12). All this is intended to suggest that a woman has the weakness of being emotional and sentimental, that she can be easily deceived by external appearances, that she may quickly respond to any offer of love or affection, and that she is not endowed with sufficient strength to resist temptation. Therefore, she always stands in need of protection by her kinsmen (II. 100. 49).

Instability in women is to be expected as a matter of course. The wise Agastya enlightens Rāma thus on the instability of women : "This has been the nature of women ever since the creation of life; if it goes well with the man, then they cling to him; if it goes ill with him, they forsake him. They imitate the restlessness of lightning (in changing their residence), the sharpness of weapons (in severing affection) and the celerity of Garuḍa and the wind (in doing wrong)" (III. 13. 5-6). More full-throated is the stricture which Kausalyā passes on the unreliability of unchaste women. Faithless wives, she says, though loved and cherished constantly by their husbands, neglect their lords and disobey them in their adversity. After enjoying long days of common bliss, when some slight misery befalls the family, they take their husbands to task; nay, even forsake them utterly. Youthful wives are thankless, false in soul, with roving hearts that spurn control, brooding on sin and are of evanescent love. No glorious deed or lineage fair, no intellectual gifts, gift or tender care can bind in chains of lasting love a woman's light and inconsistent heart (II. 39. 20-3). Hence it is that kings are advised not to confide secrets to women; neither to trust them nor repose confidence in them (II. 100. 49).

A further remark comes from Lakṣmaṇa who, on hearing the overbearing words of Sītā suspecting his *bona fides*, says : "What thou hast spoken is nothing surprising in the case of women in general. Such is the nature of womankind on this earth. Women by nature are renegades from *dharma*, fickle and cruel, and create estrangement. And thou suspectst me being influenced by this womanish nature" (III. 45. 29-30).

And, again, jealousy is integral with women. The polygamous harems of the period were always a fertile field for the free play of woman's jealousy. Kaikeyī's unflinching insistence on her two boons is well illustrative of "the venomous clamours of a jealous woman." For Daśaratha, cheated by Kaikeyī (II. 34. 36), women in general are wicked and selfish (II. 12. 100). It is worthy of note that the abduction of Sītā revolves round the jealousy of a blood-thirsty woman, Śūrpaṇakhā. Spurned by Rāma as well as by his brother, she flies into rage and rushes to fetch Rāvaṇa to avenge her wounded vanity. "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned;" and Śūrpaṇakhā was typical of this type.[1] She stooped to lying when she went to Rāvaṇa. She hid her passion for Rāma and told him about the beauty of Sītā, saying that she had wanted to secure her for his harem and was disfigured by Lakṣmaṇa when she tried to do so (III. 34. 21-2).

Bad women are always known to hanker after carnality and to lord over their husbands (II. 117. 26). Their heart is a veritable enigma. They love neither the lascivious folk who use force towards them, nor a gentle man and least a poor man (II. 100. 28; 39. 20; V. 22 2). They are the handmaids of lust and hate; those who are led astray by women are led under sway of lust or rage (*kāma-krodhābhibhūta*, II. 75. 41). They ravish the senses of man, weaning him away from higher ideals by their seductive charms, as proved by the allurement of accomplished sages by the wiles of Apsarās. Even a seemingly invulnerable youth, who has grown up in wilderness and has no knowledge of what kind of being a woman is, succumbs easily to the charms of the fair sex, as the tale of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga illustrates (I. 10). The doughtiest warrior, enthralled and besotted by female beauty, turns into a most devoted wretch that ever drivelled at a woman's knees (III. 55. 35-7). She is, therefore, fitly called a *pramadā* (II. 91. 53), a temptress. She is ever an embodiment of sensuality, to be pleased with bestowals of love (*kāma-bhogaiḥ*, VI. 111. 59). Even love for progeny does not deter her from pleasures of dalliance (VII. 4. 25). Attachment to women, therefore, is on a level with addiction to wine and dice, and is included among the ten vices (*daśavarga*) kings are advised to shun (II. 75. 41; 100. 68). In women, especially the lovely ones, there lurks even something of that most dreadful of horrors—*brāhmaṇa-hatya*; nay, the epic makes comely young women stand completely on par with murderers and all their stealthy ways (VII. 86. 15-6).

In the light of such deprecatory sentiments concerning womankind it does not seem unnatural to find Vālmīki instituting a frequent comparison between a woman and a serpent on grounds of their common qualities of deceit and craftiness. Daśaratha realizes that he has brought Kaikeyī to his house only for self-destruction, "not knowing that she was a serpent with virulent poison in the shape of a king's daughter" (II. 12. 9-10). He had failed, as Bharata thought, to realize that he was really embracing fire (II. 73. 4). The deception practised by woman, the destruction she brings in her train, and man's inability to pry behind her real nature are further illustrated by the poet's use of metaphors such as—the good-looking wine mixed with poison, a wild hunter killing the deer after luring it with music, dainty meals and condiments tasted by the disease-stricken (II. 12. 76, 77, 70-1). A man under the sway of a woman is said to be "as helpless as a deer caught in a noose and as ignoble as one who has sold his son or as a drunken Brāhmaṇa scorned by people in the streets" (II. 11. 22; 12. 78). Lakṣmaṇa calls aged Daśaratha "a vassal of Kaikeyī's will, old yet a child; a woman's thrall, infirm and base: the scorn of all" (II. 21. 19).

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[1] R. Narayana Aiyar : *On the Longer Verses in the Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 6-8 (C. K, Raja Com. Vol.).

A fair assessment and analysis of the seamy side of female character can be made only if it is examined dispassionately. It should be borne in mind that many of the above passages condemning women are put in the mouths of men who, for some reason or another, were enraged with women, or wronged by them or dissatisfied with their 'responses.' Most of the deprecatory remarks used in the Rāmāyaṇa are employed with reference to Kaikeyī who, by her mean ambition and selfishness, had aroused the ire of all thoughtful persons of the age (II. 66. 29) and do so today. These remarks, however, should not be taken as tarnishing the entire womankind for all time. Daśaratha, while giving vent to his anger and grief on Kaikeyī, expressly states that he does not mean to disparage all women by condemning Kaikeyī for her craftiness and selfishness (II. 12. 100). Good women like Sītā are absolutely free from such failings and are worthy of being extolled for their devotion to their lords (like Arundhatī among the gods, III. 13. 7). Again, the stress on women as objects of sensuality, and on the fickleness of their heart, is often laid by those who value ascetic life and want to draw people towards *vairāgya* (renunciation) through non-attachment to women. Further, the object of Daśaratha, Kausalyā, Anasūyā, Agastya and Lakṣmaṇa—in censuring women—is not censure pure and simple, but "to enjoin the performance of the opposite of what is censured and to praise such performance."[1] The motive, therefore, of these persons, whom Vālmīki depicts as inveighing against women, was really to emphasize and inculcate the high ideal of chastity (*pātivratya*) among them, and not merely to paint a dismal picture of their vices.

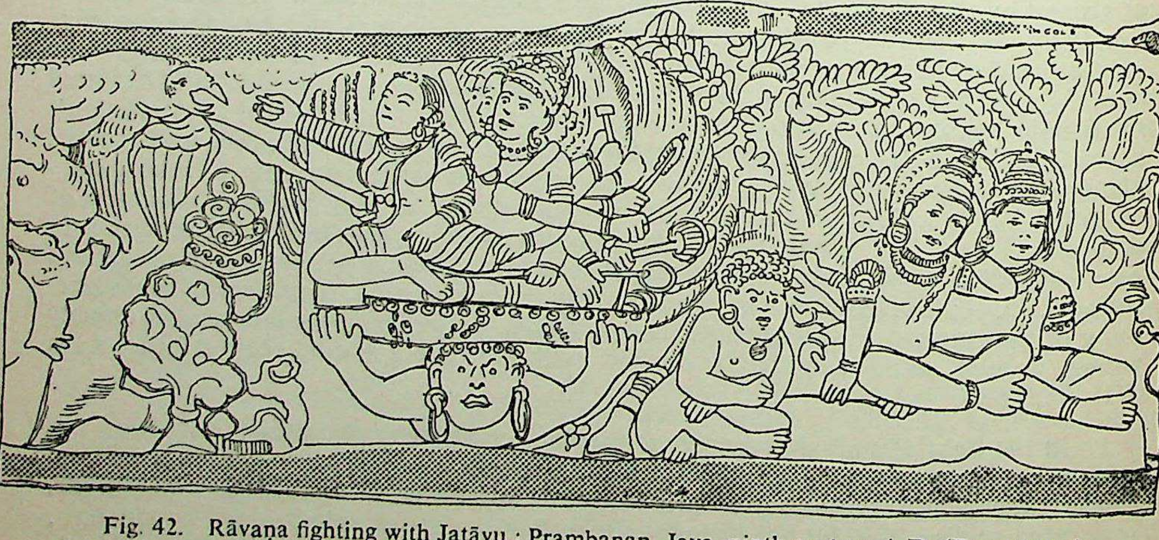

Fig. 42. Rāvaṇa fighting with Jaṭāyu ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

These are the ways in which womankind was judged and treated in the Rāmāyaṇa age by the contemporary society. The verdicts pronounced may often seem contradictory, but this is partly due to the problem being viewed from different angles and in different moods. "The attitude of the feelings and thoughts of man towards woman very often undergoes changes according to the state of mind and experience of life, and, above all, according to the personal experience of the fairer half of mankind, not to speak of the more or less dominating deeper character of the individual, or other influences."[1] In India, two types of personalities have largely determined the society's attitude towards woman—the voluptuary type and the renouncing type; and, considering both the lavish praise and the vehement censure respectively bestowed by these, it is not possible to form a wholly correct view about the society's general attitude on the subject. On the whole, by sifting and assessing the rich and varied material presented by the epic, it may be gathered that the position of women in the age was fairly happy ; at any rate, the conditions prevalent during those remote times offered woman her due as a maiden, a wife, a mother and a widow, to shape and mould the cultural destinies of the family, the society and the country at large.

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[1] Śabara on Jaimini II. 421 quoted in P.V. Kane's *A History of Dharamaśastra*, vol. ii, part i, p. 581.

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[1] J. J. Meyer : *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, vol. ii, p. 4.

CHAPTER XI

GENERAL SOCIAL CONDUCT

The measure of civilization of a society is essentially its code of social conduct, and the society of the Rāmāyaṇa age is no exception to it. In an age when justice and prosperity were backed by law and good moral conduct, social etiquette was of the greatest importance. It is, therefore, not surprising that during the Rāmāyaṇa period meticulous attention was paid to one's propriety of conduct in daily life. It was an age of charming manners, of high-bred conversation, of exquisitely polite behaviour and of suave etiquette, the impact of which put a distinctly cultural stamp on an individual's personality. The Rāmāyaṇa etiquette has always served as *the* ideal to which succeeding ages in India have tried more and more to approximate.

ETIQUETTE

Hospitality was deemed a cardinal virtue in a householder and an ascetic. "Guests should always be welcomed by the wise even if they are ordinary people" (V. 1. 112). Service to guests was part and parcel of the daily life of the sages (II. 28. 14). As Agastya told Rāma, an ascetic not welcoming a guest "feeds in the next world on his own flesh like an untruthful witness" (III. 12. 29).

The rites of hospitality were known as *atithi-satkāra* (III. 46. 33) or *ātithya* (II. 91. 1-2). *Svāgatam* or welcome was the word with which the host received a guest (II. 54. 19). These rites varied according to the status and position of the host; yet in all cases the common feature noticed in the welcoming of guests was offering *pādya* (I. 49. 18) or water for washing the feet; *arghya* (III. 12. 27) or respectful offering of water for sipping ; *madhuparka* (VII. 33. 9) or a mixture of honey, curd, *ghee*, water and sugar; a cow; and *āsana* (III. 12. 26) or seat. These preliminaries were followed by welcome enquiries and then only the purpose of the visit was talked over.

The *atithi-satkāra* performed by the forest-dwelling sages was in accordance with their ascetic (*vānaprastha*) mode of life. The rites of hospitality were attached no less importance than religious ceremonies and were, like all rituals, accompanied by oblations offered into the fire (III. 12. 27-30).

The sages of Daṇḍakāraṇya, on being apprised of the arrival of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, went forth to meet their guests and, uttering benedictions, received them respectfully with appropriate rites. Water, fruits, flowers and roots were offered to the guests, and they were housed in a cottage in the hermitage. Welcoming Rāma, Agastya honoured him with *pādya* and *āsana*, made enquiries about his welfare and begged him to be seated. Then, offering oblations into the fire and presenting *arghya* to the royal guests, the august sage entertained them with food (III. 12. 11-27). Sage Bharadvāja welcomed Rāma by presenting him a cow, water for *arghya* and *pādya*, and diverse kinds of edibles consisting of wild roots and fruits. Extending a formal welcome by saying *svāgatam*, the sage conducted the prince to a lodging in the *āśrama* (II. 54. 17, 19).

In the absence of their husbands, performance of *ātithya* rites developed on the ladies of the hermitage. Rāma had apprised Sītā of this duty before allowing her to accompany him to the forest (II. 28. 14). Sītā, in the absence of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, welcomed Rāvaṇa disguised as a mendicant. The timorous lady dared not pass by him as he appeared in the guise of a Brāhmaṇa. She respectfully asked him to be seated on a *bṛsī* or mat, facing right, and invited him to wash his feet and partake of well-cooked eatables. It would be bad manners not to accost the guest with sweet and kind words (III. 46. 33-8; 47. 1-2).

Kings would get up from their seats and advance in all humility towards sages and family priests (*purohitas*) visiting them and offer welcome with *añjalibandha* (I. 18. 42-3; 47. 21; 50. 10). King Daśaratha, on the arrival of sage Viśvāmitra at his palace, came out with his *purohita* to receive him by offering him *arghya*, *pādya*, etc., in accordance with proper rites (I. 18. 42-4). On the arrival of King Daśaratha in Videha, King Janaka welcomed him and performed the rites of hospitality, saying: "I welcome you, O great king" (I. 69. 9). Guha, in welcoming Rāma, felt exalted at the visit of a guest like him and placed himself with all his resources at his service. He offered him various kinds of food, *arghya*, and a bed for him, and fodder for his horses (II. 50. 36-40; fig. 43).

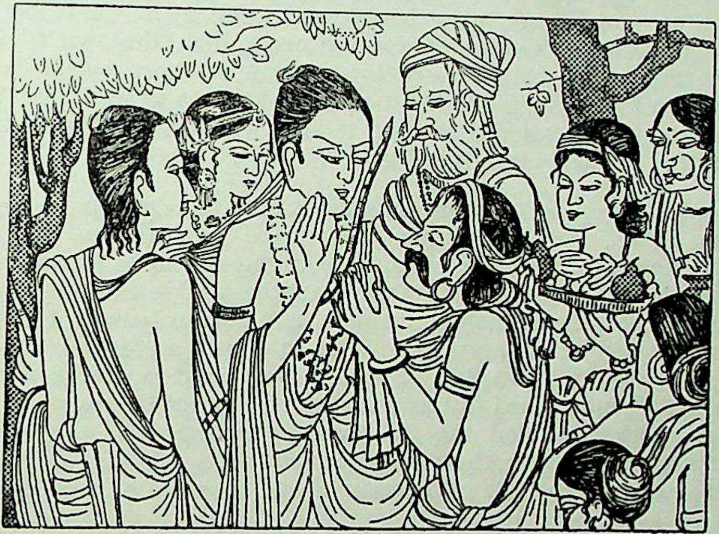
Fig. 43. Guha welcoming Rāma (Krishna Devsarey).

The extreme humility and obliging spirit which the kings of the age showed to renowned sages, and the genuine pleasure they derived in welcoming them, can be gauged from the words which Kārtavīrya Arjuna addressed to Pulastya: "Thy visit is hard to obtain. On beholding thee, my city hath been turned into Amarāvatī. Today have I obtained all auspiciousness, today hath my religious observance been fruitful, today hath my birth proved blessed and today hath my devout penance been crowned with success as I bow unto thy feet. This my kingdom, these my sons, this my wife and this mine own self—are all at thy disposal. Do thou order, O Brahman, what I may do for thee" (VII. 33. 10-2).

After bidding welcome to the guest, the host was expected to make kind enquiries about him. The nature of these differed in the case of kings and sages. The sages used to enquire of kings about royal and state matters (I. 53. 7-9). After accepting Daśaratha's hospitality. Viśvāmitra enquired about his welfare and the well-being of all his friends and relations in the town and the provinces, the prosperity of his kingdom and exchequer, the behaviour of the tributary kings and the performance of all the human and divine rites (I. 18. 45-7). Bharadvāja made enquiries of Bharata about his family, army, treasury, friends and ministers (II. 90. 6-7). Rāma, when welcomed by Guha, enquired about his health, family, wealth, friends and kingdom (II. 50. 42).

The kings, playing host to sages, enquired of them whether all was well with their penance, fire-worship and disciples (I. 52. 4). When visiting Bharadvāja at Citrakūṭa, Bharata enquired about his health, sacrificial fire, disciples, and about the fruit trees, birds and beasts in the hermitage (II. 90. 6-7). On being welcomed by Śabarī, Rāma asked her : "O thou of sweet accents, hast thou got all hindrances to thy asceticism removed? Is thy asceticism getting stronger every day? O thou, having asceticism for thy wealth, has thou curbed thy anger and 'fare'? Hast thou observed the commandments and attained to mental felicity? Hast thy attendance upon thy spiritual guides borne fruit?" (III. 74. 8-9).

While hospitality was common, scrupulous attention was paid to the relative status of the guests. When Bharadvāja received Bharata and his retinue at his hermitage, the sage made welcome enquiries with due regard to precedence (II. 90. 6). Viśvāmitra, when welcomed by Daśaratha, Vasiṣṭha and other sages at Ayodhyā, spoke to them according as their status required (*yathānyāyam*, I. 18. 48). On sacrificial occasions or public dinners, the different castes were well entertained and given their due regard (I. 13. 14). Skilled artisans and experts in sacrificial works were honoured and entertained just as was their due (*yathākramam*, I. 13. 16). The various kings, who attended the Aśvamedha of Daśaratha, were welcomed by Sumantra in accordance with their ranks (*yathārham*, I. 13. 36). Instances could be multiplied to show how the rule of precedence was observed by people in their daily life.

The offering of salutations on every conceivable occasion was an indispensable part of the Rāmāyaṇa etiquette. The different types of salutations consisted of *praṇāma* (VI. 127. 49) or obeisance (or bowing down the head with folded hands) (fig. 44); *prāñjali* (I. 47. 21) or the palms; *añjalipuṭa* (II. 3. 33) or lifting up the folded palms to the head and above; *praṇipāta* (II. 4. 10) or folding up prostrating oneself like a staff with the head placed on the feet of the person to whom respects were being paid and the hands grasping the feet. This was followed by *nāmoccāraṇa* (II. 3. 33) or announcing one's name, and by *pradakṣiṇā* (II. 40. 1) or circumambulation before departing.

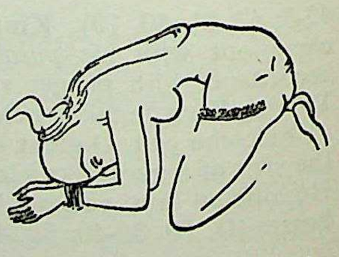

Fig. 44. *Praṇāma* (or bowing he head with folded hands); Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

On meeting friends and relations, people prostrated themselves before elders and superiors, embraced their equals in age and received the prostrations of the younger people (II. 103. 48). Towards sages, and towards elders and preceptors, prostration was the usual form of salutation followed by the announcement of one's name. Rāma, at Bharadvāja's hermitage, is said to have first offered his obeisance alone with his brother and wife, and then revealed the exiled party's identity (II. 54. 12-3).

Sons meticulously observed proper etiquette on meeting their parents. When Rāma came to see his father during the assembly session at Ayodhyā, he folded his palms, bowed and prostrated, announcing his name at the same time (II. 3. 32-3;

4. 10). Lakṣmaṇa warmly pressed Rāma's feet before addressing him (II. 31. 2). Vibhīṣaṇa saluted his elder brother, Rāvaṇa, by holding his (Rāvaṇa's) feet and announcing his name (VI. 11. 28).

As said above, embracing was a common form of greeting friends and relations of equal age or status. When visited by Rāma, Guha is said to have embraced him with all affection (II. 50. 36). After accepting Sugrīva's proffered hand of friendship, Rāma heartily embraced the Vānara chieftain (IV. 5. 13). During the formalities of hospitality, embracing was resorted to both when meeting and departing, the initiative being taken by the host if he was superior in age or status. Sage Sutīkṣṇa welcomed Rāma by embracing him; and, on his departure too, the sage embraced him affectionately (III. 7. 7; 8. 10).

Sometimes elders, in order to express their affection towards youngsters, embraced them. This was accompanied by smelling the head (II. 25. 40; I. 77. 4), which was regarded as the best expression of love on the part of elders and well-wishers (VII. 71.12). Upon the prostration of Bharata, Rāma grasped him by the hand, smelt the crown of his head, embraced him and seated him on his lap (II. 100. 3). When Rāma prostrated before his father in the assembly hall, Daśaratha lifted him up by his folded palms, drew him closer, embraced him and beckoned him to be seated on a bejewelled seat of gold brought in by the attendants (II. 3. 33-5). It was customary for elders to bless youngsters with a gladdened heart when the latter saluted them (IV. 9. 25).

Embracing was also a means of expressing pleasure. If anybody said or did something great or clever, he would receive an embrace. On hearing from Jaṭāyu the story of his friendship with the late Daśaratha, Rāma is said to have embraced joyfully that king of the Gṛdhras (III. 14. 35). Bharata embraced Hanumān on learning from him the news of the imminent arrival of Rāma from his forest exile (VI. 125. 40, 42). When Mārīca consented to abet in Rāvaṇa's plot for the kidnapping of Sītā, Rāvaṇa was highly pleased and embraced him warmly (III. 42. 5). On being delighted with Lakṣmaṇa's excellent construction of a hut at Pañcavaṭī, Rāma warmly and affectionately embraced him by way of a reward (III. 15. 27-8). Sītā, on seeing her husband return safe after routing Khara and his army, was exceedingly happy and embraced him again and again (III. 30. 40-1). Commenting on this last incident, the late Srinivasa Sastri observes in his *Lectures on the Rāmāyaṇa*: "In well-bred houses, where conduct and manners are regulated according to the highest patterns prescribed, it is a common rule for the husband to embrace his wife first. Very rarely, I think, does a well-bred wife go and embrace even her husband. On this occasion, Sītā forgot this rule and as soon as she saw her husband, she went and voluntarily hugged him—the rarest joy a husband can have."

Embracing was in vogue among women too. Sītā affectionately embraced Saramā, wife of Vibhīṣaṇa, and gave her a seat (VI. 34. 17). This practice of embracing women friends by way of greeting was prevalent even during the time of Kālidāsa, as is proved by a stage direction in his *Vikramorvaśīya*, Act I, scene 1. This form of greeting is observed by Brāhmaṇa women in Kashmir to this day.

At moments of grief, women used to beat their stomachs with their hands (III. 45. 38).

It is interesting that shaking of hands was also in vogue. Daśaratha and Romapāda clasped each other by the palm and then departed (I. 11. 22). Friendship was solemnized by grasping each other's hands. When Sugrīva extended his hand of friendship to Rāma, the latter grasped it and pressed it with great pleasure (IV. 5. 12). Taking the hand of one's companion into one's own was a gesture of intimate friendship and affection. On being well pleased with the words of Lakṣmaṇa at

Pañcavaṭī, Rāma took his hands into his own and *then* addressed him (III. 15. 9). When Hanumān returned from Laṅkā after tracing the whereabouts of Sītā, he is said to have taken Vālī's son by the hand and sat down at ease (V. 57. 37). Touching somebody with one's right hand was a mark of affection. Sumantra was sent back by Rāma from the forest with an affectionate touch with his right hand (II. 46. 33-4).

At partings, younger people were blest with *mantra*, smelt on the head and had auspicious ceremonies performed for them by the father, mother and priests (I. 22. 2-3). When people departed on long journeys, it was usual for their friends and relations to accompany them for some distance (VII. 72. 21). But it was not advisable to follow departing friends and relations too far if their safe return was desired. The ministers of Daśaratha advised him not to follow the outgoing Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, too far if he wished them to be back safe and sound (II. 40. 50). The words *śreyase vṛddhaye punarāgamanāya ca* (depart for welfare, for prosperity and for coming back) were repeated on farewell occasions (II. 34. 31).

Since the Rāmāyaṇa is largely concerned with the life of kings and princes, it furnishes copious references to courtly etiquette which was comparatively the more elaborate and dignified. The king was an object of great reverence for his subjects. Councillors, citizens and Brāhmaṇas greeted him with the words: "May victory crown thee!" (*vardhasva*, VII. 74. 3). The citizens manifested their profound respect by circumambulating the prince or king and prostrating before his chariot (II. 50. 6). Sītā, being unaware of the impediment to Rāma's proposed coronation, asked him why the subjects from the city and country, along with the guilds in all their decoration, seemed to show no longing to follow the king-elect (II. 26. 14).

Kings, too, were expected to show due regard to their ministers, citizens and the members of the *sabhā* or assembly. Daśaratha reciprocated the *añjalis* or folded palms of the members of his assembly (II. 3. 1). When the councillors summoned by Rāvaṇa grasped his feet, they were honoured by him in return (VI. 11. 23). Rāvaṇa is represented as addressing the heroic commanders of his army with folded hands (VI. 93. 2). Kings used to bow down at the feet of priests and learned Brāhmaṇas (before whom they felt no loss of dignity to humble themselves, VI. 127. 63). When Suyajña, son of Vasiṣṭha, paid a visit to Rāma's mansion, the king accompanied by Sītā welcomed him with folded hands and went round him, showing him the honour that is Agni's due (II. 32. 4).

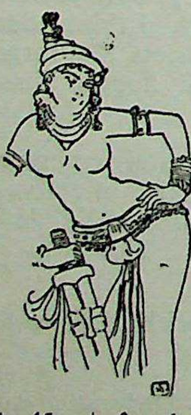

Fig. 45. A female door-keeper (*pratīhārī*); Amarāvatī, second century A D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Royal attendants were accorded a respectful treatment. Hanumān, who came to Ayodhyā to announce Rāma's arrival in the city, was honoured by Bharata with folded hands (VI. 126. 55). Servants appeared with joined hands before kings with the words: "May the worshipful one be victorious" (*vijayasva āryaputra*, VI. 32. 34-5). At dawn, bards used to arrive at the palace to wake up the king who left his bed to the tune of eulogies sung by panegyrists (VII. 37. 10).

All visitors to the royal palace had to be formally announced by the *pratīhārī* or door-keeper to the king within and were permitted to enter only on his assent (fig. 45). Even Rāma was required to announce his arrival before entering his father's palace (II. 33. 31). Generally, a faithful attendant like Sumantra, being advanced in years, had free access everywhere, even in the seraglio or *antaḥpura* (II. 14. 44). (Visitors to hermitages were also required to be announced to the presiding sage of the establishment through his disciples.)

As regards the female apartment etiquette of the palace, among the several wives of a king, precedence was given to the queen senior. Thus, Sumitrā and other wives of Daśaratha went out, with Kausalyā at their head, in excellent conveyances to Nandigrāma for welcoming Rāma home from his exile (VI. 127. 15). Again, the widowed wives of Daśaratha are described as repairing to the cremation ground in litters and other conveyances, each mounted according to her rank (II. 76. 19). Similarly, the wives of Sugrīva, accompanying Rāma to Ayodhyā in the Puṣpaka, were led by Tārā (VI. 123. 24).

Women used to bow at the feet of venerable sages. Kausalyā and Sumitrā grasped the feet of sage Bharadvāja at Citrakūṭa (II. 92. 15-6). Sītā honoured the renowned Anasūyā by a salutation (II. 117. 20).

The terms of address employed in daily parlance are always an index of the degree of urbanity reached by the people. Forms of address were then as pleasing as they were dignified. For revered sages, ascetics and Brāhmaṇas, the highly dignified third person singular (*bhavān*), suggestive of "Your Honour" or "Your Grace," was employed (III. 7. 21); and they were addressed as *bhagavan* ("Your Holiness," II. 54. 24). The employment of the second person singular (*tvam*), though a normal form of address in daily routine, is so sweetened by its association of affection and reverence that the idea of looking down or pity finds no place at all in such modes of address. Even the king may be addressed in the second person singular ; but the mode was usually adopted by the Brāhmaṇa (VII. 73. 12), the sage (VII. 1. 17) and the charioteer (II. 14. 50), always a highly respected personage in the ancient Indian society. Commands are often shorn of their harshness by their being couched in the passive : "Let this be done" (II. 3. 23).

Friends equal in status used to address each other by their personal names (II. 50. 36) or as *tāta* (II. 51. 2). Among members of the family, the mother used to be referred to in the third person singular as *bhavati* (II. 24. 23) and addressed as *amba* (II. 21. 50), *devi* (II. 18. 18) or *ārye* (II. 21. 2). The father was addressed as *tāta* (II. 34. 31), the elder brother as *ārya* (II. 99. 38), his wife as *devi* (II. 13. 21) and the younger brother as *saumya* (II. 22. 7).

Āryaputra (II. 27. 4) was a commonly accepted form of address by the wife to the husband. He was also spoken to as *mahābhāga* (III. 9. 6), *mahābāhu* (III. 9. 8) or *priyadarśana* (II. 26. 17). The taboo about the wife calling the husband by his name or mentioning his name to others did not obtain in the age of the Rāmāyaṇa. Sītā addressed her husband as Rāma (II. 27. 2; 29. 7). When talking to Anasūyā, Sītā referred to Rāma by his personal name (II. 118. 50, 52). At II. 30. 13, Sītā addresses Rāma as *ramaṇa* (my husband).

Quite a variety of forms was employed by the husband in addressing his wife. Such dignified terms of address as *devi* (II. 13. 21), *bhadre* (II. 13. 18), *kalyāṇi* (II. 63. 6) or *manasvini* (II. 26. 28) more than etherealized the enthroned divinity of the lover's heart. Softer expressions of endearment like *bāle*, *bhīru* (II. 12. 22-3) and *priye* (II. 26. 38) were more human manifestations of the husband's tender love. Besides using the proper name of one's wife (VI. 123. 4), it was also the practice to address her with reference to her parentage or the place she hailed from ; *cf.* Janakanandini (II 30. 31), Maithili (VI. 123. 18), Vaidehi (VI. 123. 17), Jānaki (II. 26. 20) and Janakātmajā (II. 55. 28).

Gratitude was freely expressed for any consideration or favour received. Guests used to express thanks to the host at the time of departing for the welcome, shelter and fare received (III. 8. 5). Bharata gratefully acknowledged the princely entertainment offered by Bharadvāja to his troops (II. 92. 5). Upon the destruction of the Rākṣasas of Janasthāna the sages, with Agastya at their head, paid homage to Rāma and expressed their gratitude to him (III. 30. 33-4, 36-7). Sugrīva ascribed the restoration of his luck, repute and kingdom to the grace of Rāma (IV. 38. 25). When Rāma was elected crown prince by the *sabhā* of Ayodhyā, King Daśaratha expressed his thankfulness to it, saying : "I am exceedingly pleased with your decision and feel myself greatly honoured" (II. 3. 2). At the termination of the battle of Laṅkā, Rāma publicly expressed his appreciation of the friendly services of the Vānaras, of Sugrīva and Vibhīṣaṇa, and heartily thanked them (VI. 122. 13-7).

In the daily conduct of life, the highest importance was attached to truth and fair-play. People were courteous and polite and readily apologized for their faults. For instance, Vālī had strongly reprimanded Rāma for clandestinely killing him ; but when Rāma, in his sweet and consoling words, exposed to him his (Vālī's) unrighteous conduct and assured him of his protection to his wife and son, the dying Vānara chief, with folded hands, expressed contrition for his moral aberration, apologized to Rāma for having insulted him with improper words and begged of him to be forgiven (IV. 18. 48-66). Even to Sugrīva he expressed regret for his past conduct (IV. 22. 3). Sugrīva also expressed his deep remorse for having contrived his brother's death (IV. 24. 1-23). Lakṣmaṇa apologized to Sugrīva for the rough words he had used on the latter's dereliction of duty (IV. 36. 20).

At the time of departure for a long period, it was customary for well-bred people to beg pardon for lapses even if apparently there were none. When going out on exile, Rāma begged of all his mothers to forgive him for any default of his committed consciously or unconsciously in consequence of his nearness or "familiarity" with them (II. 39. 38). Tārā apologized to the dying Vālī for all the faults she might have committed unwittingly (IV. 20. 25).

CUSTOMS

An important aspect of the Rāmāyaṇa society was *laukika samaya* (IV. 18. 4), or custom, which played an important part in the daily life of the people. In fact, customs had the force of law; they constituted the unwritten law of the land. It was incumbent upon kings to punish those who violated the sacred sanctions of custom. Rāma, in his rejoinder to the charges of Vālī, blamed him for not being cognizant of virtue, knowledge and worldly customs (IV. 18. 4).

The fear of inviting public criticism of one's conduct was a primary factor in prompting one to adhere to the age-old customs and traditions of the land. Kings were obliged strictly to tread the path of rectitude because of the fear of public opinion and public contempt. Vilification by the people (*lokāpavāda*, VII. 97. 4) was a potent factor in regulating their public and personal lives. What Daśaratha dreaded most (in banishing Rāma to the forest) was infamy, disgrace and popular condemnation on account of the injustice done to his son (II. 12. 94). He lamented that his fair name would be sullied by popular criticism throughout the length and breadth of the land (II. 13. 14).

It was the bounden duty of a righteous king to respect the precedents and traditions of his land and to desist from following his own personal whims and caprices. The precedents established by the seers of old served as unimpeachable authority in adopting a particular course of action. Rāma referred to the punishment of an adulterous monk by his ancestor, Māndhātā, to justify his action in killing Vālī (IV. 18. 33). Viśvāmitra's quoting two precedents, to convince Rāma of the propriety of killing a woman like Tāṭakā in the interests of humanity, has already been referred to (I. 25. 20-2). Kaikeyī quoted the precedents of Sagara, Śibi and Alarka to bring pressure on Daśaratha for being true to his promise (II. 36. 16, 4-5).

Among the interesting customs of the age was the high place given to fire as witness. Friendship was solemnized before fire. Rāma and Sugrīva swore eternal friendship with each other in the presence of fire (IV. 5. 15-6; fig. 46). Friendship contracted before fire was deemed irrevocable, just as marriage solemnized in the presence of sacred fire (VII. 12. 20) was regarded unbreakable and binding on both parties. An oath had added strength when made before fire (whose sport served as witness). Sītā, for instance, swore before fire before entering the flames to prove her chastity (VI. 116. 24-5).

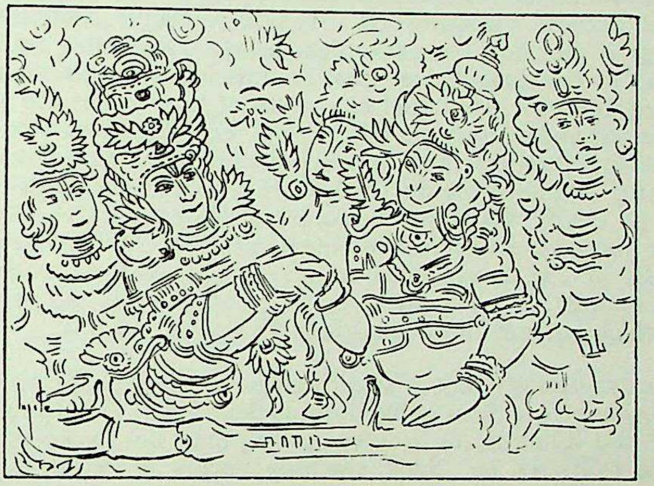

Fig. 46. Rāma and Sugrīva shaking hands in friendship ; from a Cochin mural, seventeenth century A. D.

There were set customs in connection with processions organized to accord royal reception to kings and their guests. On such occasions, the city used to be tastefully decorated by the citizens. Trees, spires, palaces, houses, temples and turrets were profusely embellished with upraised pennons, buntings and floral festoons, while the roads, court-yards, tomb-stones and cross-ways were swept, watered, strewn with flowers, covered with curd, clarified butter and fried paddy, lighted with *dīpavṛkṣas* or lamp-posts and fumigated with fragrant incense.[1] Hundreds of men, like policemen of today, used to keep the roads clear of indisciplined throngs (VI. 127. 10). When the king came in view, the citizens with folded hands received him with great ovation, shouting welcome greetings (*svāgatam*, VI. 127. 51) and victory benedictions, which was duly reciprocated by the king (VI. 128. 35). People with *akṣatas*, gold and sweets in their hands, kine, virgins and Brāhmaṇas led the procession (VI. 128. 38). Bards, panegyrists, musicians, queens, State officers, dancing girls, soldiers with their wives and all the citizens used to join the procession (VI. 127. 3-5). When the procession passed through the main thoroughfares, people used to shower *lājas* or fried grain on the king (II. 43. 13). Ladies showered flowers from the windows of upper storeys on either side (II. 16. 37-8), while Brāhmaṇa maidens presented fruits and flowers to the king after circumambulation (II. 43. 15). Eulogists and bards announced the arrival of the royal personage with the sound of conchs and bugles, while the relatives, kinsmen and ministers carried garlands and sweets (*modakas*) in their hands (VI. 127. 16-7).

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[1] See I. 11. 24-5; II. 5. 17-8; 6. 10-8; 43. 10 ; VI. 127. 2, 7-9, etc.

Another universal practice was for the people to take recourse to swearing in order to prove their *bona fides* to others. One's word of honour had got to be sealed and sanctified by associating it with a solemn oath or *śapatha* (VII. 97. 10). Kaikeyī made Daśaratha swear that he would fulfil his promises of old, and called on all the gods to witness his oaths (II. 11. 1-16). People generally swore on such persons or things as they held dearest to their heart. Daśaratha swore on his dearest son, Rāma, to convince Kaikeyī that he would fulfil his words of honour given (II. 11. 7). When, however, she found him reluctant to grant her the promised boons, she swore on herself and on Bharata (II. 12. 49). Lakṣmaṇa swore on his bow and on his virtuous deeds, charitites and prayers when insisting on following Rāma to the forest (II. 21. 16). Rāma swore on truth and his meritorious deeds to emphasize his intention not to falsify his father's promise to Kaikeyī (II. 34. 48). Almost every character in the poem has sworn at one time or another. Parents generally swore on their children (II. 48. 23), chaste wives on their fidelity (VII. 97. 14-6) and soldiers on their weapons (III. 27. 3). Hanumān swore by all the hills and the fruits and herbs he had tasted which became him unquestionably well (V. 36. 38).

A rather extraordinary way of swearing was by the legs, for respect to superiors was paid by bowing before them or by touching their feet. "I bind you down by an oath upon my legs," said Rāma to his brothers, asking them not to object to his resolution to forsake Sītā (VII. 45. 2). Such swearing occurs at two or three places in the Rāmāyaṇa. It occurs when a senior asks a junior to perform an act and he, somehow, suspects that the junior is reluctant. When Khara and Dūṣaṇa, with their 14,000 followers, threatened the brothers and Sītā. Rāma asked Lakṣmaṇa to go into a cave with Sītā and remain there ready with his bow and arrow : "I do not want you to oppose this order. I bind you by an oath upon my legs" (III. 24. 13). So, too, Vālī bound Sugrīva by an oath on his feet and left him to fight Māyāvī (IV. 9. 14). This swearing by the elder's feet had therefore its sanction in the social usage.

The custom of self-immolation by fasting, or otherwise, seems to have been of frequent occurrence. It was usually resorted to out of heart-rending grief at the non-fulfilment of one's objective. Aṅgada and his search party of Vānaras, when foiled in their attempts at discovering Sītā, resolved to put an end to their lives by fasting (VI. 55. 20-1). This was known as *prāyopaveśana* (IV. 53. 13). Great merit was attached to death by fasting. Andhamuni blessed his dead son to attain to the region reached by those who renounced their lives by fasting (II. 64. 44). Kausalyā declared her resolve to resort to the vow of fasting, being unable to sustain her life without Rāma (II. 21. 27). Tārā, too, at Vālī's death declared her intention to put an end to her life by fasting (IV. 20. 26). Sītā, in goading Lakṣmaṇa to go to Rāma's rescue in the forest at Pañcavaṭī, declared : "Without Rāma I shall drink virulent poison, enter fire or dive into the Godāvarī. I shall destroy this body either by hanging or by dropping from the top of a peak" (III. 45. 36-7). These were evidently methods of self-immolation. It is related in the Uttarakāṇḍa that Lakṣmaṇa forsook his life by restraining his breath (and the senses) at being abandoned by Rāma (VII. 106. 15). Rāma himself, overwhelmed with grief at the separation of his near and dear ones, ended his life by descending into the Sarayū; and innumerable other citizens of Ayodhyā followed suit (VII. 109).

The custom of *pratyupaveśa* or *satyāgraha* consisted in putting moral pressure on a party to grant one's righteous demands by lying on *kuśa* grass at his residence, forsaking food and all comforts. Bharata decided upon *pratyupaveśa* before Rāma at Citrakūṭa to compel him to return to Ayodhyā. But Rāma protested against this and told him that a Kṣatriya should never perform it and that the practice was confined to Brāhmaṇas alone (II. 111. 13-7). In our day, too, it has amply been demonstrated what force *satyāgraha* carries.

The current custom of cessation of business (hartals or strikes) as a protest, or by way of public mourning, probably had its beginnings in the Rāmāyaṇa age. When Rāma was banished at the instance of Kaikeyī, people desisted from all rejoicings and merry-making, merchants did not exhibit their wares, shops were not lively, householders did not cook ; and nobody worried about loss or gain. The sacrificial fires were all cold, no sacred texts were recited, no edifying tales were related and the shades of midnight gloom came down enveloping the mournful town. The city resembled a mighty ocean with all its waters dried up (II. 48. 4-5, 34, 37).

And, then, there were other interesting customs. It was a custom to honour and worship the conveyance before ascending it for travel. Rāma is described as going round and saluting the chariot which Indra had sent for his use in his battle with Rāvaṇa (VI. 102. 17). The Vānara ladies accompanying Sītā to Ayodhyā are said to have circumambulated the Puṣpaka before ascending it (VI. 123. 36-7).

The number *three* had come to acquire a peculiar sanctity in the age. Solemn rites were repeated thrice to render them highly efficacious. Agastya advised Rāma to repeat the *Ādityahṛdaya* hymn thrice before fighting Rāvaṇa (VI. 105. 26). The bridal couple rendered their marriage union irrevocable by going together three times round the sacred fire (I. 73. 39). Janaka repeated thrice the offer of his daughter in marriage to Rāma (I. 71. 21-2). Kaikeyī is described as asking Daśaratha to send Rāma to the forest, repeating her demand three times (II. 14. 9).

Time was announced in royal palaces by beating a big drum every *yāma* (three hours) with a golden rod (II. 81. 2). Auspicious decorations, called *kautuka-maṅgala* (II. 16. 25), were done in the house by the mother, elderly women or priests on festive ceremonies. Showering of flowers was an auspicious method of expressing joy at some memorable event : when Rāvaṇa was dead, flowers were profusely showered upon Rāma (VI. 108. 28). The legend of Ahalyā relates that her restoration to her marital status was marked by a profuse shower of flowers (I. 49. 19).

It was considered improper by the wise to mourn for heroes who sacrificed their lives on the battle-field, "abiding by the code of the Kṣatriyas" (IV. 25. 9-11). Thus, Hanumān told Tārā : "You have satisfied the worldly practice with a profuse discharge of tears. Grief and lamentations do not tend to the welfare of the deceased" (IV. 25. 2-3).

The Rāmāyaṇa refers to the custom of *tṛṇāntarābhibhāṣaṇa*, *i.e.*, talking through the medium of a blade of grass held in between. As a chaste woman, Sītā detested having to speak to such as Rāvaṇa of impure intentions. But once, when Rāvaṇa threatened to take her life, she had to speak and then—she used this device of holding a blade of grass as a token screen between herself and the demon king (V. 21. 3). The purport of this formality was that the speaker addressed the listener not directly but through the agency of a grass blade, and the listener only "overheard" what was said : the grass blade symbolized a person, whereas the actual man spoken to was thus made a third person, obviously the custom implying contempt for the person addressed.

BELIEFS

Astrology had an important place in the life of the people. Punctilious care was taken to see that every new business was got off to start at moments of proved astrological auspices (*muhūrtas*, VI. 3. 33). Occasions like coronations (II. 4. 22), marching to battle (II. 89. 21), entering a new house (II. 56. 25), commencing a sacrifice (I. 13. 39), celebrating marriages (I. 73. 9) and setting out for a journey (VI. 3. 33) were commenced at auspicious hours (and any untoward happening was attributed to some faulty *muhūrta*). Rāvaṇa made a grievous error in stealing Sītā at an inauspicious hour which, as Jaṭāyu pointed out to Rāma, was named the Vinda-*muhūrta*—an hour ultimately favourable to the appasent loser and unfavourable to the apparent gainer who *must* ultimately meet with his own destruction (III. 68. 12-3).

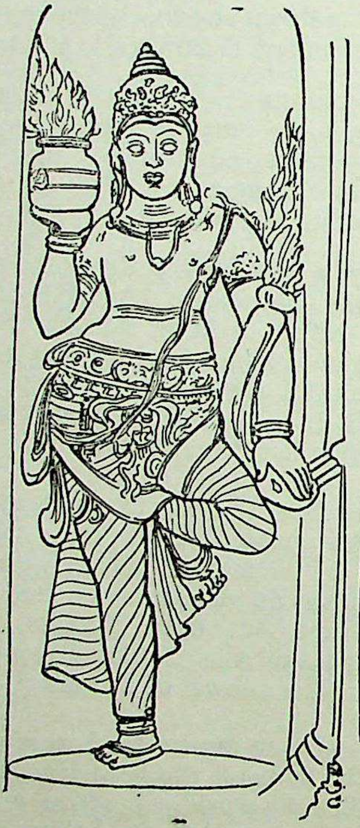

Fig. 47. Nāgarāja carrying *purṇaghata* (pitcher full of water); from Polonoruwa, fifth century A. D. (Ceylon).

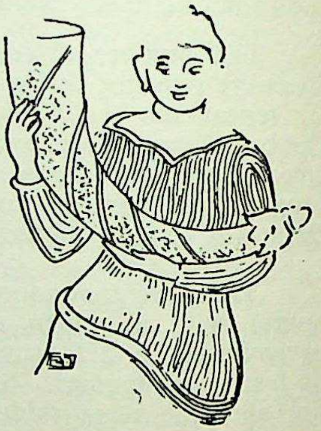

Fig. 48. Bearer of cornucopia; Amarāvatī, second century A. D. (Government Museum, Madras).

It was considered inauspicious to have one's conveyance facing the south when starting on a journey. Sumantra had placed Rāma's chariot facing northward before starting from the Tamasā's southern bank to the forest (II. 46. 34). When entering an unfriendly country, placing the right foot first was generally avoided: Hanumān, when entering the fort of Laṅkā, avoided the gate, jumped over the rampart and put his left foot first (V. 4. 3). The prevalence of the *svastyayana* or propitiatory rites is also indicative of the deep-rooted belief of the age in astrological influences. Overflowing vessels (*pūrṇakumbha*, fig. 47) and bovine horns (*ṛṣabha-śṛṅga*, fig. 48) were regarded as symbolic of auspiciousness and plenty (IV. 26. 33-4).

The age was utterly steeped in the belief in fate or destiny known as *daiva* (II. 47. 14) or *kṛtānta* (II. 22. 15). The idea of an all-powerful destiny is propounded by Rāma thus : "Our life and death, joy and pain, anger and fear, and loss and gain—all are surely the work of fate. Even saints with rigid penance, when once they feel the stroke of fate, do no more engage in stern vows—but 'downfall' enslaved by love and rage. To what else can the hindrance to the completion of tasks undertaken and the origination of unforeseen events be attributed if not to the interference of destiny? If the mind is disciplined by this rationale, there can be no cause for sorrow resulting from thwarted undertakings" (II. 22. 22-5).

Rāma was convinced that the somersault in the course of events, transforming his coronation ceremony into banishment to the forest, was all due to the promptings of destiny (II. 22. 15). He advised Lakṣmaṇa not to find fault with his father or Kaikeyī, as the whole episode was ordained by destiny (II. 22. 30), he said. When Kausalyā was powerless to dissuade Rāma from his resolution to go to the forest, she consoled herself with the thought that destiny was the most powerful agency in the world, crowning or afflicting people with happiness or misery as it pleased *her*, that *it* was incomprehensible and that *it* alone goaded Rāma to betake himself to the forest, disregarding his mother's words (II. 24. 5, 35).

Rāma comforted Tārā by telling her that grief and joy were both ordained by the Creator whose dispensations could not be transgressed by the three worlds which must at all events be subservient to His mandates (IV. 24. 42-3). The prowess of *kāla* is the mightiest of all powers: it overwhelms creatures with calamities—the brave and the heroic all lying helpless before Him! (III. 69. 48-50). When the citizens of Ayodhyā, intent on following Rāma to the forest, could not discover the track of his chariot, they thought they had been foiled by some supernatural agency (II. 47. 14). The Rākṣasa women, wailing over Rāvaṇa's death, exclaimed that the slaughter of many Vānaras and Rākṣasas had been brought about solely by that "Divinity that shapes our ends, dictate her how we may" (VI. 110. 24).

Despite this abiding faith in fate, the importance of human effort (*pauruṣa* or *puruṣārtha*) was not underrated. In fact, success was considered to be dependent on both (I. 18. 47; V. 36. 19; VI. 73. 6): one's present destiny being regarded as the fruition of some previous endeavour. Lakṣmaṇa asserted that only the weak and the coward talked of destiny: that destiny was powerless with brave people (II. 23. 16). According to him one, who dares to control one's fate with vigorous action and manly soul, need not lose heart, though threatening fate at every step assail his hope (II. 23. 17).

The Rāmāyaṇa also contains a plethora of references to omens and portents (*nimitta*, VI. 65. 47; 2. 24), belief in which was universal. At the commencement of every important action, one never omitted to notice minutely the portents naturally presenting to one's view. The success or failure of an undertaking was gauged by one's interpretation of them in the light of prevailing communal beliefs. Throbbings of the eyes and other parts of the body, seeing birds or hearing their voices ...were often found to augur happiness or misery to men (III. 52. 2). Daśaratha hastened to perform Rāma's *yauvarājya* ceremony at the earliest opportunity as he became apprehensive at the sight of portents prognosticating his impending death or some other inexplicable calamity (II. 4. 19-20). When Rāma, after killing Mārīca, wended his way to his hut, he noticed several portents which filled him with anxiety about Sītā (III. 57. 18-9). At the time of Rāma's wedding, a crow flying high in the sky gave out an inauspicious cry indicating that at no distant date the prince would be separated from Sītā; but on the eve of his contracting friendship with Sugrīva, the same birds sitting on a tree and cawing cheerfully was taken to suggest that he would soon be re-united with her (IV. 1. 55-6).

Omens were carefully observed when starting for a battle. Jackals were ever held to be inauspicious during a war (III. 23. 10). A headless trunk dropping before one on the battle-field presaged certain discomfiture (VI. 54. 32). The sight at dusk of a frightful, withered, tawny-hued male figure (looking like death) with a head shaven, peering into the houses of people, foreboded a dread calamity for a warring nation (VI. 35. 33-4). When Khara (III. 23. 1-18), Dhūmrākṣa (VI. 51. 31-5), Akampana

(VI. 55. 10-3), Kumbhakarṇa (VI. 65. 47-52) and Rāvaṇa (VI. 95. 43-8) set out for battle with Rāma, there appeared dreadful omens prefiguring their doom; but "being urged on by the force of the Leveller" (VI. 65. 52) and deluded by their own ignorance and vainglory (III. 23. 19-20), they did not desist from their rash ventures. On the other hand, when Viśvāmitra set out from Ayodhyā along with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa for the destruction of Taṭakā (I. 22. 4), when Rāma commenced his march for the invasion of Laṅkā (VI. 4. 6-7) and when Sītā, out of despair, intended to hang herself in Laṅkā (V. 28. 19; 29. 1), there occurred good omens auguring success and prosperity. It must also be noted, that at the occurrence of one and the same incident, omens may take place which prove auspicious or the reverse to different persons in accordance with the respective fate in store for each. For instance, when the friendship between Rāma and Sugrīva was being contracted, the left eye of Sītā, Vālī and Rāvaṇa throbbed, presaging happiness for the one and disaster for the rest (IV. 5. 31).

The omens believed in during the Rāmāyaṇa age covered a large variety of aspects such as natural phenomena, animal world, physical signs and mental moods. The following is an attempt at classifying these omens, shown throughout the epic as they are, under approprate heads;[1]

ILL OMENS

(*a*) *Natural Phenomena*: The Sun losing its brilliance; comets resembling *parighas* (columnous perihelions) appearing beside the Sun; a fiery circle dropping from the Sun; a dark circle, bordered with red resembling that of charcoal, appearing in the vicinity of the Sun; a crimson, slight, rough and cramped rim round the Sun with a blue mark visible on its disc;

The Moon, though not shining at night, burning and rising with dark, red rays, as if intending to exterminate the people;

Stars not coursing as usual or appearing covered or surrounded by a tremendous volume of dust; stars, wearing the sheen of fire-flies, falling even in clear day;

Falling of burning meteors from the sky with terrific crash and thunder; quarters shrouded in darkness; fearful evenings immersed sandal-red;

Shaking of the earth along with the woods, the oceans and the mountains; tops of mountains trembling and emitting loud roars; trees toppling down or getting shorn of their fruits and flowers;

The oceans overleaping their shores and engulfing continents;

The wind ceasing to blow or blowing awry or darkly with a thunder-like sound; a fair day looking foul with the wind whizzing roughly; rising of cloudy dust without any wind; the wind blowing wildly, shaking the earth, felling the trees, covering the Sun and making the quarters invisible;

Clouds containing meteors and looking dark like asses, appearing goblinish, fierce, rending with cries and howls and pouring showers mixed with blood; clouds raining down bones and hot blood;

Fire being enveloped in smoke on ignition, and then throwing out scintillations—

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1. See III. 23; VI. 95; VI. 65; VI. 41; VI. 23; VI. 6; VI. 51; I. 74; VI, 10; VI. 36; VI. 35; III. 57; VI. 55; III. 59; VI. 4; I. 22; V. 27, etc.

its bringhtness obscured by vapour, and not burning adequately even on oblations being poured into it with *mantras* ;

Withering of lotuses in tanks.

(*b*) *Animal World* : The slacking of the course of horses ; steeds drawing chariots suddenly losing their energy; steeds yoked to cars and gifted with great celerity suddenly dropping down on level highways strewn with blossoms; live vehicles dropping profuse tears; horses, albeit feasted on fresh grass, neighing distressfully as though hungering still ;

Elephants being devoid of the temporal juice; camels, asses and mules, hair standing erect, shedding tears and not returning to normal, although treated medicinally;

Promiscuous inter-breeding of animals : cows bringing forth asses and mongoose mice; cats pairing with leopards, swine with dogs and Kinnaras with Rākṣasas and human beings ;

Dogs in houses feasting on articles of worship ; two-legged cats crying in loud accents;

Milk of the kine being dried up ;

Yelling of jackals withinauspicious notes at twilights ; jackals howling hideously at the back; dreadful jackals emitting from their mouths live flames and frightful cries ; jackals of terrible forms, giving out cries like thunder and bursting out in hoarse laugh; wolves and their like, with deer, approaching the gates of palaces in swarms and thunderously roaring ;

Reptiles appearing in kitchens, sacrificial fire-chambers and places of Vedic recitation ; appearance of ants in clarified butter;

Fierce and frightful beasts, and birds sending forth dreadful cries or in distressful guise, crying in piteous accents facing the Sun ; birds wheeling on the left, or birds and beasts staying on one's left and crying; birds, swarming under a cloudless welkin, feasting on flesh and gore, gyrating at the right side of a car ; red-footed, white, sky-coursing pigeons, going about as if urged by Doom; female parrots in houses wounded and worsted by other birds delighting in discord, in dropping down and emitting indistinct notes ; blood-footed pigeons and *sārikas* darting off around ; fishes and fowls lying inert in tanks;

Vultures and crows emitting inauspicious yells; dropping down wheeling around of crows, hawks and vultures ; vultures sitting on the banners of chariots ; a vulture squeaking facing the south and pricking both its sides ; vultures sitting sadly and distressed upon tops of houses; mighty swarms of vultures, with mouths belching forth flames, wheeling over like Death; crows croaking with heavy accents, or emitting harsh cries in numbers on all sides and seen in swarms on tops of edifices.

(*c*) *Physical Signs* : Throbbing of the left arm, the left eye and the heart (in case of men); trembling of the right eye (in case of women) and of the body; moistening of the eye ;

Falling of the voice—its faltering or growing harsher ; the countenance becoming pale ; aching of the head ; the goad dropping from the charioteer's hands.

(*d*) *Mental Moods*: The mind growing depressed, restless, stricken with anxiety, piteously and cheerlessly.

GOOD OMENS

(*a*) *Natural Phenomena* : All the points of the compass appearing pleasant and the Sun appearing cloudless ;

The wind blowing mildly and pleasantly, inspiring comfort ; blowing of dust-free breeze of delicious feel ; the odorous gale not blowing strongly ;

Water becoming clear and tasting sweet; woods stocking with fruit; trees bringing forth all the wealth of the season.

(*b*) *Animal World*: Beasts on earth streaming south (as a token of peace restored); birds and beasts crying in sonorous joyous voices; birds entering their nests and, highly delighted, pouring forth warbling notes, announcing the advent of a happy occasion.

(*c*) *Physical Signs* : Throbbing of the upper lid of the eye; throbbing of the left eye, left arm and left thigh (in case of women).

(*d*) *Mental Moods* : The mind being filled for delight for no apparent reason.

A glance at the above list would no doubt tend to shew the deep-rooted belief of the age in omens and superstitions. But it should be noted, however, that most of the above portents pertained to different aspects of natural phenomena, and the Aryans—nature lovers that they undoubtedly were—observed them from the commonsense point of view : the benign aspects of nature appealing to them as happy and auspicious, the grim, the dreary as evil and inauspicious.

Belief in dreams coming true in one way or another was equally widespread. They were regarded as precursors of future events. On finding that the Rākṣasī guards were scolding Sītā, Trijaṭā told them that she had dreamt horrible dreams that presaged the victory of Rāma (and destruction of Rāvaṇa and his relatives, V. 27. 6). The sight of a monkey in a dream was indicative of disaster, according to Sītā (V. 32. 9). Bharata at Rājagṛha was oppressed by evil dreams in the small hours of the morning and was filled with anxiety concerning his father, and about Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (II. 69. 2, 17). Daśaratha told Rāma that he had been visited by evil dreams in which he had heard thunder from a blue sky and had seen flaming meteors crashing through space (II. 4. 17). The mountain Ṛṣyamūka was believed to be a potent fructifier of dreams. A person sleeping on the summit of that hill and dreaming of an accession of wealth was sure to obtain a fortune on awakening (III. 73. 33).

The following sights in dreams betakened impending disaster (II. 69. 8-16; VI. 35. 28) :

Plunging from the summit of a mountain into a dirty pool of cow-dung (with one's hair loosely flowing about) ;

Floating on a pool of cow-dung ;

Drinking oil with laughter, anointing oneself with oil and diving into oil head downwards ;

Feeding on rice mixed with sesamum, seated on a sable seat of iron, clad in a sable garb and beaten by black and yellow women ;

Wearing a garland of red flowers, with the body daubed with red sandal, and hurrying towards the south in an ass-drawn chariot ; being laughed at by women clad in red garment and dragged by a hideous monstress ;

Mighty dark-hued women in front of dwellings seizing at the furniture thereof, "speaking" inauspiciously and laughing ;

Drying up of the ocean ; falling of the Moon on the earth ; universal darkness ; falling in fragments of the tusk of the monarch's riding elephant ; sudden extinction of flaming fire ; cracking of the earth ; withering of trees ; issuing of smoke from peaks.

People dreaded very much lest the evil deeds of a person should descend on them because of any iniquitous act on their part. When Śuka, the spy of Rāvaṇa, was apprehended by the Vānaras and was in mortal terror of his life, he cried to Rāma : "If I lose my life, may all the evil deeds that I have committed between the night I was born and the night I shall die, be thine." Hearing this pitiful cry, Rāma prevented the Vānaras from killing him and ordered his release (VI. 20. 33-4).

It was commonly believed that a man or a woman could be possessed by evil spirits and made to behave in an abnormal way. Heavy breathing, loss of memory, semi-consciousness, violent shaking of the body, denudation of vitality were some of the features generally believed to be found in a person gripped by evil spirits. When Sumantra took leave of Rāma in the forest, he found Sītā breathing heavily, fear-stricken, self-forgetful and standing in a haphazard fashion like one possessed by *bhūtas* or evil spirits (II. 58. 34). So was Kausalyā lying on the ground, quaking again and again, devoid of vitality like one seized by evil spirits, when she was observed by Sumantra on his return to Ayodhyā after leaving Rāma and others in the forest (II. 60. 1). Daśaratha found Kaikeyī in the wrath-chamber lying on the ground as if struck by some malignant spirit. Such maladies were supposed to be eradicated by incantations and other occult rites (II. 10. 29-30).

A man of meritorious deeds was supposed to become a star in the sky. Sītā mourning over Rāma's (supposed) death declared : "Thou hast become a star of the firmament as the fruit of thy great act (namely, the carrying out of the command of thy sire)" (VI. 32. 19).

The eclipses of the Sun and the Moon were supposed to be due to the planets Rāhu and Ketu who were believed to swallow the Sun and the Moon. The *aśvatarī* (mule) was supposed to be killed by its young ones as soon as they were born (III. 43. 41). The universe was supposed to be supported by eight giant elephants stationed in the eight quarters, and earthquakes were accounted for by the shaking of their heads out of weariness (I. 40. 15).

SPAN OF LIFE

The maximum span of human life was believed to be 100 years. When Mantharā tried to persuade Kaikeyī that the crowning of Rāma would spell ruin to her and to her son, Kaikeyī, who then loved Rāma as her own son, said : "Why do you grieve over Rāma's coronation ?" Bharata too, after Rāma's 100 years, will succeed to the kingdom of his forefathers (II. 8. 15-6). Kaikeyī, too, thus regarded 100 years as the upper limit of Rāma's life. Again, when on reaching Pañcavaṭī, Rāma asked Lakṣmaṇa to select their future abode, Lakṣmaṇa, with folded hands, replied : "I have no will of my own, Kākutstha, while you live your 100 years" (III. 15. 7). From this, it is clear that the normal limit of human life span was supposed to be the Vedic century. Further, when Hanumān providentially met Sītā, who was about to hang herself in the Aśoka park at Laṅkā, and gave the happy tidings about Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, she said : "Blessed surely (now I realize) is the folk-song—'If one only lives, happiness will come to one though after a hundred years'" (V. 34. 6). When, later on, Hanumān gives Bharata the news of Rāma's victory over Rāvaṇa and his imminent arrival in Ayodhyā, the same folk-song (*gāthā*) is repeated by Bharata (VI. 126. 2). On the Prasravaṇa Hill, Rāma speaks of the slow passing of the four rainy months as though they were a 100 years (IV. 30. 64) ; his *varṣa-śatam* referred, no doubt, to the maximum duration of human life. In view of these evidences, therefore, when the Rāmāyaṇa says that Daśaratha lived for 60,000 years (I. 20. 10) and Rāma ruled for 10,000 years (VI. 128. 104), it can safely be deduced that these figures are poetic exaggerations for sixty and ten respectively.[1] Patañjali (*Mahābhāṣya*, II. 76) more sensibly, however, thinks that the word *varṣa* in such statements stands for a day, and Rāma, accordingly, ruled for 10,000 days or about twenty-eight years.

A general belief current then was that the misfortunes of the subjects were ultimately attributable to the maladministration of the king. Where there is no king, the fruitful moisture does not fall (II. 67. 9). The drought that befell the country of Aṅga was believed to be due to some fault of its king, Romapāda (I. 9. 8-9).

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[1] T. Paramasiva Aiyar : *Rāmāyaṇa and Laṅkā*, p. 125.

CHAPTER XII

EDUCATION

The domain of Kosala, with law and order firmly established, was brisk with intellectual activity. Education was the privilege not only of the highest (the Brāhmaṇas), but of all the *dvi-jas*, which is clearly brought out by the fact that, down the ages to 600 B.C., the *upanayana* ritual (which marked the commencement of the child's education) was obligatory for every Aryan of either sex.[1] Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas all, thus, received at least the rudiments of academic and religious education, which must have resulted in a high percentage of literacy among the people. The high tribute paid by Vālmīki to Daśaratha that there was none during his reign who was atheistic or untruthful or slenderly-read or illiterate (I. 6. 14), can be properly appreciated in this light only. This was a necessary consequence of an obligatory *upanayana* being followed by proper Vedic and literary studies.[2]

The personality of the king was, indeed, the beacon light which guided the conduct of his subjects in daily life. Being the head of the State, he was expected to know the art of bringing out the latent capabilities of the subjects; it was his obligation to serve and to create such an atmosphere as would draw out the best from the varied temperaments that constituted the real wealth of the country, keeping competition within healthy limits. He had to offer every opportunity to them for the display and stimulation of their powers of originality and invention by arranging festivities and demonstrations. Besides, he had to give direct monetary assistance to specialists working under his patronage and, thus, give a fillip to literary and artistic activities in his realm.

Rāma was a great patron of learning. Hundreds of students and learned men lived on his munificent charities. At the time of his exile to the forest, he liberally distributed his wealth among them. He invited Suyajña, son of Vasiṣṭha's preceptor, and bestowed on him and his wife costly gems and ornaments. Similarly, several other Brāhmaṇas, and hosts of students besides, were offered rich presents by him (II. 32. 5-16, 19-22).

Of the relative importance of nature and nurture—heredity and training—in the scheme of education, Vālmīki seems to place more emphasis on heredity (inherent individual nature). According to him, cultural training, without a proper background of healthy tendencies inherited from parents, is like sowing seeds in a barren soil. This educational theory of nature in preference to nurture is well exemplified by the poet in the case of Rāvaṇa. One temporary defect in the mood of Rāvaṇa's mother (*viz.*, her request for progeny from sage Viśravā at the twilight of his age, considered inauspicious for conception) was sufficient to cause a congenital defect in the outlook of her children which no course of studies or penances could totally eradicate. "Rāvaṇa had all the advantages of Brahmanic descent and Vedic studies. He, along with his son and with Kumbhakarṇa, underwent sternest austerities for obtaining divine favour. During their period of austerities, they seemed to surpass even the Aryan sages in self-restraint and in vows of self-mortification. But once they had obtained the divine favour and the concomitant yogic powers their 'artificially kept-up' piety relaxed and their demoniacal minds quickly gravitated towards their naturally aggressive and murderous instincts. The extraordinary powers bestowed on them by divine grace was systematically made to serve wicked ends and not to further the cause of *dharma*. Asceticism, rituals and Vedic learning are effective in their cultural influence only if the individual does not inherit an aggressive ego from hereditary influences."[1]

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[1] A. S. Altekar: *Education in Ancient India*, p. 174.
[2] *Ibid.*

The doctrines of *karma* and re-birth, which were universally believed in, further strengthened the supposed efficacy of the theory of nature in education. According to these doctrines, the tendencies developed in previous lives, rather than the training in the present one, determine whether or not our intellect will turn out good and our moral propensities strong.[2] Rāma wondered how Kaikeyī, a princess of noble nature endowed with excellent qualities, could utter distressing words to him in Daśaratha's presence, and came to the conclusion that it was *daiva* or destiny which exerted its power over her and led her astray (II. 22. 19-20). Sumantra subscribed to the theory of heredity by declaring that girls generally take after their mothers and boys after their fathers (II. 35. 28). Kaikeyī, though mother of the noble Bharata (III. 16. 35), had inherited her mother's vices (II. 35. 17) Sumantra told Rāma: "I deem the *brahmacarya* mode of life or study or meekness or sincerity is attended with no fruit, ever since you have come by calamity" (II. 52. 17). The various Vānara heroes are said to have inherited the strength, skill and virtues of their powerful fathers,

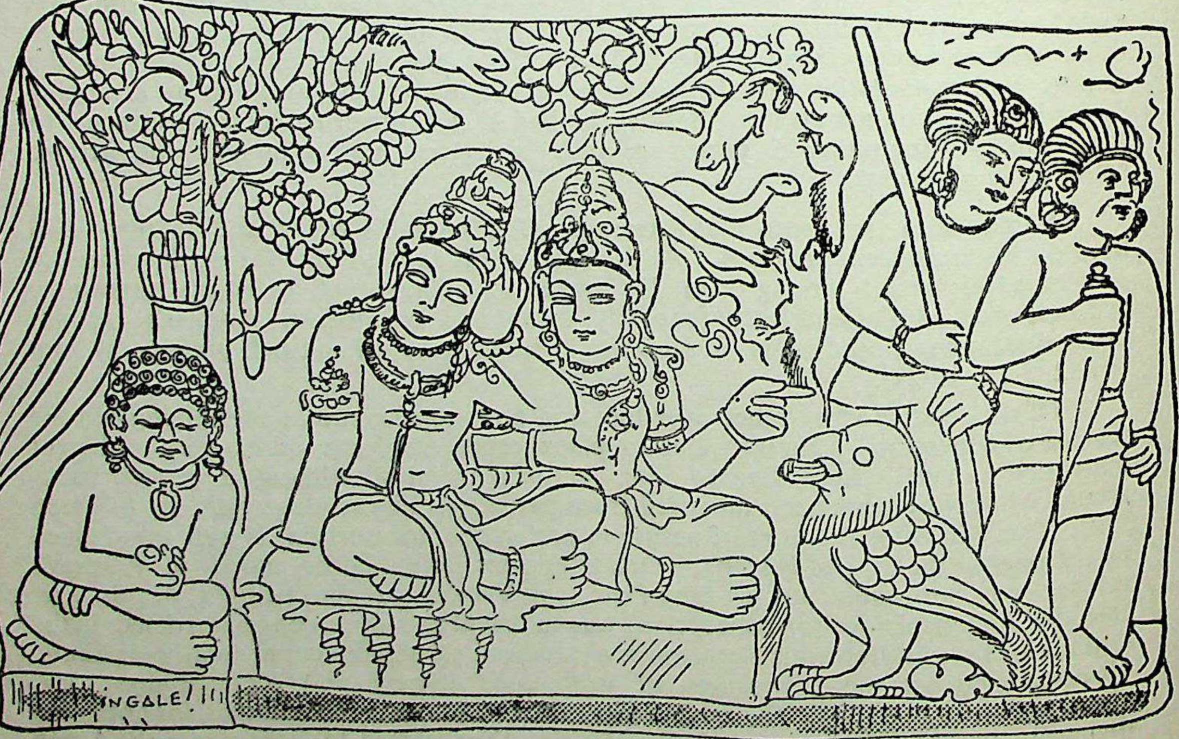

Fig. 49. The dying Jaṭāyu passing Sītā's ring to Rāma ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

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[1] *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. ii, p. 40 ; also *cf.* VII. 59B. 26.

[2] A. S. Altekar : *op. cit.*, p. 37.

although born of an inferior race of mothers (I. 17). Nala, the Vānara architect, inherited his engineering skill from his father, Viśvakarmā (VI. 22. 48-9). Similarly, Hanumān inherited his fleetness and strength from Vāyu, the wind-god (IV. 66. 30).

For education, the parents placed their child under the absolute care of a *guru* or preceptor. The student had to reside in the hermitage of his *guru* and develop his faculties under his personal supervision. His emotional and intellectual personality was thus shaped by an expert who was specially equipped for the onerous task and whose main duty in life was to teach and train. The teacher's personal example played a great part in moulding the character and improving the calibre of the student.

King Daśaratha had entrusted Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to the renowned sage, Viśvāmitra. Although Rāma had by then finished his formal education (I. 18), he could and did benefit immensely from his association with the venerable saint during the brief period he remained with him. This was a sort of post-graduate training for him and not actually "the longer probation" in a *gurukula.*

In Viśvāmitra's company, the prince came into contact with environments and surroundings conducive to his free and healthy moral and mental development. Placed in the hands of this eminent *guru* at an age when his attitude to persons and things was yet in the formative stage and when his mind was still flexible and impressionable, Rāma was profoundly influenced by the sage. Usually, the mark of a young child is an absence of fixed habits, of stubborn volition and of persistent ways of thinking. Adolescent Rāma exemplified this to a remarkable degree when accompanying Viśvāmitra to his hermitage. The various sites and events which he witnessed on the way impressed him deeply and excited his youthful curiosity (I. 23 7-8; 24. 6-7; 25. 2 ; 28. 21-2) ; and every time he looked up to the venerable sage who was himself a tried person of high moral character. The sage, cognizant of the formative proclivities of Rāma's mind, tried to form and stabilize his habits by employing his benign and subtle influence. He inculcated in Rāma the habit of early rising and duly performing ablutions and worship of the gods (I. 23. 1-2). He taught him to venerate all benign aspects of nature, its rivers and streams (I. 24. 11).

The preceptor took particular care to select such students as appeared to him sincere, zealous and well-behaved, who should be worthy of the knowledge to be imparted to them. Viśvāmitra's insistence on Rāma accompanying him to his hermitage was prompted by Rāma's excellences as an ideal student and warrior. The sage imparted the knowledge of the *balā* and *atibalā* sciences to Rāma because he had no doubt about his being worthy of such education (I. 22. 20). Vālmīki, too, used much discretion in selecting from amongst this pupils the most suitable for reciting his epic story. Sītā's twin sons, Kuśa and Lava, were among such selected reciters, as they really *were* the most qualified disciples (I. 4. 3-12).

The preceptor was held in high reverence by the society as much as by his pupils. Since he conferred the supreme gift of *vidyā* or knowledge on the pupil, he was considered to be one of the three 'genitors' of the latter, the other two being the parents and the elder brother (IV. 18. 13). The teacher was in letter as well as spirit given the exalted rank of the parents (II. 30. 33). Indeed, he was to be revered even more than the latter ; to the parents people owe their physical birth, to the former their intellectual regeneration (II. 111. 3). Rāma in his eulogy of the *guru* declares him to be a virtually god corporeal amidst men (II. 30. 33).

Teaching and learning were very common. There were several classes of teachers : There was the *guru* (II. 111. 3) who stood in *loco parentis* to the disciples (dwelling with him) and imparted to each the knowledge for which he or she was fit. Then there were the *ācārya* (II. 111. 4) and the *kulapati* (II. 116. 4), the latter being in charge of numbers of pupils who flocked to him from far and near. The *śrotriya* (*cf*. I. 1. 1) was one in whom the baser passions had been subdued by generations of Vedic study and contemplation. The *tāpasas* (I. 14. 12) were those who practised austerity and imparted teaching to the people that came to them. These were forest-dwellers and their preachings have been preserved for posterity in the *Āraṇyakas*. The *brahmavādins* (I. 12. 5) were the expounders of sacred texts. The *upādhyāya* (II. 100. 14) was a specialist who took fees and imparted instruction only in his branch of learning The *śikṣaka* gave instruction in arts like music and dance. Tumburu was the *gāna-śikṣaka* (music teacher) of the Apsarās (II. 91. 18). The *parivrājaka* (III. 47. 1) was the follower of *nivṛtti-mārga*, the path of renunciation. He was an itinerant preacher who wandered from place to place teaching that peace and renunciation were the highest objectives of existence. Sometimes the *bhikṣukas* and *bhikṣiṇīs* (II. 29. 13) also acted as teachers or preachers.[1]

Generally, the teacher had no fixed income. The practice of charging fixed scale of fees from students, in the Rāmāyaṇa age, is not in evidence. But the teacher was given voluntary gifts by his students, during or after their course of studies, though there was no prior stipulation about this. Since the preceptor was usually a priest, he obtained offerings (*dakṣiṇā*) on occasions of rituals and sacrifices (I. 14. 48-51). Kings and princes visiting the hermitages also appear to have generously met the financial needs of the *kulapatis* and their *gurukulas* (*cf*. I. 52. 9; II. 90. 8)

The method of imparting instruction was planned and scientific. The first stage of life, the *brahmacarya*, was specially set apart for learning and education. During this period, the Aryan student was taught the habits of simple life. Whatever the social position or status of the students' families, they had to submit to the same stern and disciplined mode of life in the preceptor's home. All the four sons of Daśaratha had to undergo the rigours of student life in the traditional manner. Daśaratha speaks of how Rāma had grown emaciated by studying the Vedas, leading the *brahmacarya* mode of life and serving his preceptors (II. 12. 84). When left under the charge of Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, though sons of a king, were required to sleep on beds of grass, but they never felt it irksome (fondled as they were by the affectionate words of their *guru*, I. 22. 24).

The student's life was characterized by self-discipline, with firm control over the senses (*niyatendriya*, I. 2. 8). Learning had to be acquired like *tapas* (I 22. 21)—an injunction which stressed the rigorous moral discipline necessary for life's preparation. The student had to lead a celibate life till he took the ceremonial bath at the completion of his studies (II. 1. 20). Marriage was contemplated only after a boy's studies were over (I. 18. 37-8).

The first and foremost duty of the student was to hold the teacher in deep reverence and to render implicit obedience to his commands. Rāma prepared to perpetrate the seemingly unchivalrous act of slaying a woman (Tāṭakā) without any enquiry on his own, since such was the order of the venerable Kauśika, his *guru* (I. 25. 22; 26. 1-4).

The disciple's general behaviour was to be in conformity with rules of decorum. He was to render personal service to the teacher, known as *guru-kārya* (I. 22. 23), and do all sundry work in the hermitage like cleaning the court-yard (III. 1. 3), hewing wood for fuel (III. 11. 50) and collecting the sacrificial material (III. 1. 4-5).

The student used to rise with the lark or even earlier. He would then take his bath, perform *sandhyā* and offer prayers. A good deal of time in the morning must have been spent in performing various rituals connected with fire-sacrifices (*agnihotra*). Thereafter, the student went to offer his respects to the preceptor. The evening had again to be spent in the performance of *sandhyā* and the rituals (I. 23. 21). All this is evident from the narration of training Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa received at the hands of Viśvāmitra.

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[1] The definition of these types of teachers is inferred from the Rāmāyaṇa *see* S.V. Venkateswara : *Indian Culture through the Ages*, vol. i, pp. 128-30.

The hard and disciplined life which the student was required to adopt during his period of study impressed upon him that life was a hard and long struggle. The daily routine of early rising, bath, morning prayer, fire-worship, salutation to the *guru*, *etc*., went a long way towards formation of good habits, towards the infusion of piety and towards thorough mastery of their subjects. The performances of the daily sacrifices gave to a student of theology a practical training which stood him in good stead in later life as a priest.

From the fact that Sītā in the Aśokavāṭikā is described by Hanumān to be emaciated "even as the learning of one who habitually studies on the first day of the fortnight"(V. 59. 31), it may be inferred that the first day of the fortnight (*pratipat*) must have been availed of as a holiday.

Sixteenth year was the end of boyhood and the young warrior was ordinarily proficient in arms by that time. When Rāma was about to be taken away from Ayodhyā by Viśvāmitra on his military mission, Daśaratha exclaimed: "He is yet a boy (*bāla*, I. 20. 7), he is still not sixteen and has not acquired the art of leading war campaigns" (I. 20. 2)—a passage showing clearly that the age of sixteen marked the termination of boyhood and that a young man of that age was supposed to have acquired military training and equipped himself for the vocation or mission of his life. The Rāmāyaṇa does not limit the *brahmacarya* stage of life to twenty-five years.

Educational institutions were well run and the *āśramas* or hermitages were residential seats of learning. The whole country was in fact full of *āśramas* where education and learning were rife. An *āśrama* was presided over by a *kulapati* who used to have a number of wards under him. At the holy Kāmāśrama, students came "from father to son" (I. 23. 15); in other words, generations of the same family received education in the same school. The monk teachers (*munis*) lived with their wives (*muni-patnayaḥ*) and children (*muni-dārakāḥ*) (VII. 49. 1, 14).

Sage Andhamuni is described as living in his *āśrama* together with his wife in the *vānaprastha* mode of retired life, while their son worked hard in it as a student. The latter was versed in the Vedas and studied, critically and in detail, the *śāstras* regularly in the latter part of the night (II. 64. 32).

Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā visited many *āśrama*-schools during their forest exile. When they visited the *āśrama*-school of Bharadvāja, they found the great-souled *ṛṣi* surrounded by *gaṇas* or batches of pupils who had just finished their sunset fire-worship (II. 54. 11-2). Charming hostels or residential blocks for scholars (*āvasathas*), plastered or painted with yellowish clay, stood on both banks of the river Yamunā flowing through the *āśrama* grounds (II. 91. 42). The evening hours in these *āśramas* were usually spent in discourses on different topics (II. 54. 34).

Th *āśrama*-school of sage Vālmīki had several pupils, one of whom was Bharadvāja. His disciples used to sing in chorus an eloquent verse (I. 2. 15) uttered by their *guru* in a moment of inspiration (I. 2. 39). Vālmīki's hermitage seems to have been a specialized centre of instruction in literature and fine arts. This is amply evident from the training which he gave to Kuśa and Lava, the twins born of Sītā, who were under his charge (*āśrama-vāsinau*, I. 4. 5). The princely pair received Vedic education and acquired from him a mastery in music and histrionics. They were made to commit the entire Rāmāyaṇa to memory and to sing it to the accompaniment of a lyre (I. 4. 6, 10-2, 33-4). By impressing upon them the undesirability of accepting any remuneration (VII. 93. 11), Vālmīki laid before them the lofty ideal of selflessness and taught them not to sell their art for a mere pittance.

The duties of the principal (*kulapati*) of an *āśrama*-school, as related in the Uttarakāṇḍa (59 B. 43-4), consisted of maintaining approved diet, duly dividing attention between *deva-dvijas* and *dāsī-dāsas, i.e.*, between the divinities on the one hand and the menial establishment on the other, of preserving the sacred articles of the institution, of engaging only in decent pleasures, of gentle and polite behaviour and of doing good to all members of the school. In modern terminology, the principal had charge of school hygiene, hostel and college establishments, school and staff discipline, benefactory funds, theological or religious education, and the school chapel, museum and library.[1]

The teaching staff and pupils did not always lead a sedentary life, and occasionally went out on educational trips to augment their knowledge, secular as well as scriptural. Thus, a party of students and teachers of Siddhāśrama (*sarṣi-saṅgha*, I. 31. 14), with their *kulapati* (Kauśika) and the Kosalan princes (Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa), set out for the capital city of Mithilā on an excursion to profit by a visit to the great festival at Janaka's court (I. 31). Similarly, it is stated in the Uttarakāṇḍa that Vālmīki and his disciples came to attend Rāma's Aśvamedha sacrifice where Kuśa and Lava gave a grand recital of the Rāmāyaṇa (VII. 93. 1, 4). The critical estimates of learned audiences, and contact with all sorts of people and environments in the country, too, must have been of great educative value.

How the residents of the *āśrama*-schools, despite their theological preoccupations, remained well informed of current happenings is instanced from the fact that all through the fourteen years of Rāma's exile, sage Bharadvāja kept himself informed through itinerant scholars of his school who frequently visited the capital city.[2] So when Rāma returned from the South and revisited Bharadvāja's *āśrama* on his way, he enquired of him about the state of affairs at Ayodhyā (VI. 124. 2) and surely he must have got all the information that he needed to know.

The common Vedic practice of migrating from one school or teacher to another for special courses was in vogue also in the Rāmāyaṇa days. Viśvāmitra hailed from an *āśrama* on the banks of the upper Kauśikī, beside the Himālayas in northern Aṅga. Later he migrated south-west to Siddhāśrama to complete his ritual observances, *i.e.*, theological qualifications (I. 34. 12). Rāma, who had his initial military training under Sudhanvā (II. 100. 14), received lessons in advanced military science from Viśvāmitra (I. 27-8) and Agastya (III. 12. 32-6 ; VI. 108. 4, 14).

Apart from the orthodox Brahmanical *āśramas* in the countryside, there were educational institutions in the city of Ayodhyā associated with traditional learning, secular culture and heterodox doctrines. For instance, the military instructor of the Ikṣvākus of Ayodhyā had an *āśrama* for military training in or around the city ; and in the *sadman* or residence of this *ācārya* were kept the sets of armour and weapons, presented to the princes Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa at their wedding, for regular military exercises until taken away from his custody at the time of the Crown Prince's exile (II. 31. 31). He was possibly the same *upādhyāya* (Sudhanvā), a preceptor of the Kosalan princes (well versed in all military exercises and accomplished in the science of polity or *arthaśāstra*), towards whom Rāma urged Bharata to be respectful during his regency (II. 100. 14).

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : *Educational Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p. 116.

[2] These pupils were designated as *pravṛtta* or going forth into the outside world from the *āśrama* on excursions (VI. 124. 16). They must have been "specially selected scholars" who worked as itinerant teachers sent forth from the monasteries at regular intervals on semi-religious educational missions. (*Ibid.* p. 128, footnote 1).

Then there was the school of the Vāsiṣṭhas who were the hereditary royal chaplains and preceptors. They had a respectable educational establishment in Ayodhyā, probably managed by Suyajña-Vāsiṣṭha, a *sakhā* (II. 32. 2) or class-friend of the princes. The parting interview between Suyajña, Rāma and Sītā shows that the latter had already an establishment (*niveśana*) goodly enough to fit in the many rich presents of conveyances, furniture and jewellery from the royal couple. Lakṣmaṇa personally went to Suyajña's *niveśana*, met him there in the hall of the sacred fire-altar, and most politely invited him, on the Prince's behalf, to come to the palace (II. 32. 1-2).

There was also a school of the Taittirīyas in Ayodhyā. One of the Vedic *ācāryas* of this school, named Abhirūpa, received gifts in the form of conveyances, silk clothes and maid-servants from Rāma (II. 32. 15-6). Evidence also appears of the existence of the schools of Agastya and Kauśika, for an Agastya and a Kauśika, evidently teachers of those *āśramas* in the city, are stated to have been presented by the exiled prince with gems, gold, silver and cows (II. 32. 13-4).

The readers and investitured students of the schools of Kaṭha-kālāpas were residential; they did not work to earn, yet enjoyed the good things of life. Nevertheless, they were esteemed by the great of the land for their learning mentioned to have received, for example, from Rāma 80 *yānas* (mules or mule-driven cars) loaded with precious things, 1,000 *śālivāhas* (draught oxen), 200 *bhadrakas* (stud-bulls) and 1,000 cows for the supply of "delicacies" (II. 32. 19-21).

The number of Vedic schools, accordingly, must have been sufficiently large in Ayodhyā to ensure that amongst its citizens there was no illiteracy nor deficiency of learning (I. 6. 14). The numerous regular Vedic students in the city were organized into a *mekhalinām mahāsaṅgha* (investitured students' union), which could approach the royal family and receive gifts—even as much as 1,000 coins—for each member of the *saṅgha* (II. 32. 21).

Over and above regular *āśrama* studies, evidence is also found of laymen (citizens), well versed in the *śāstras*, often repairing to the suburban parks (where most of the *āśramas* were located) for discussions on controversial matters (II. 67. 26). Such debates must have brought orthodox and heterodox notions, and theological and secular thoughts, into instructive conflicts—our such being indicated in what the Rāmāyaṇa records about the *lokāyatikas* and Jābāli (II. 100. 38-9 ; 108-9).

Moreover, the sacrifices of the times, with their learned congregations and discourses, were unofficial means of diffusing knowledge. They were more or less World Fairs or Parliaments of Religions. "If wealth, power, long life, progeny and heaven were the results the performer had in view for himself, food, kind treatment, honour, rewards for merits, chances to compete in the display of skill and redistribution of riches and political power were nonetheless benefits which sacrifices conferred on society as a whole."[1] Daśaratha's horse-sacrifice afforded scope for the working of various educative agencies ; expert architects, carpenters, wood-carvers, artisans, great artists, dancers and actors, scholars and astrologers were employed by the court in large numbers, and at the sacrifice there was none who did not know the six branches of the Vedas or did not keep vows or was ill-equipped for learned debates (I. 13. 6-8 ; 14. 21). Between the rituals there were sober yet eloquent debates about fundamental causes (*hetuvāda*) amongst Vipras

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[1] *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. ii, p. 37.

(inspired or enthusiastic scholars), desirous of victory over one another (I. 14. 19). The Aśvamedha sacrifice of Rāma in the Uttarakāṇḍa was almost converted into a hierarchic and educational exhibition, as it consisted of noted monks (*mahāmunis*), learned men (*paṇḍitas*), representatives of commercial interests (*naigamas*), puranic bards and chroniclers (*paurāṇikas*), scholars in the linguistic and phonetic sciences (*śabdavidaḥ*), experts familiar with the characteristics of sounds or scholars in musical science (*svarāṇām lakṣanajñān*), professional musicians (*gandharvas*), poets and prosodists (*chandaḥsu pariniṣṭhitān*), art critics (*kalā-mātra-viśeṣajñān*), experts in astrology (*jyotiṣe paraṁgatān*), knowers of rituals and ceremonies (*kriyā-kalpa-vidaḥ*), logicians (*haitukān*), widely read men (*bahuśrutān*), scholars in puranic lore (*purāṇajñān*), initiated Vedic scholars (*vaidikān dvijasattamān*), painters (*citrajñān*), scholars in law and custom (*vṛtta-sūtrajñān*) and experts in singing and dancing (*gīta-nṛtya-viśāradān*). It was before such an august and learned assembly that the disciples of Vālmīki gave an exhibition of their epic recitals. Indeed, Rāma's Aśvamedha is described to have been a high-class intellectual *melā* or fair, the entire sacrificial arena being designated as *yajña-vāṭa*, the residential area for *āśrama*-teachers as *ṛṣi-vāṭa* and the elegant quarters specially built for Vālmīki as *Vālmīki-vāṭa*—a division which indicates careful planning on a large scale as is involved in the laying out of an exhibition site in our own time (VII. 93-4).

The educational curriculum of the day may be conveniently studied under four broad heads : physical, intellectual, professional and moral.

As the period of the Rāmāyaṇa was rife with wars, the necessity of receiving thorough training in military science was well realized. The physical education of the day aimed at equipping the students firstly with a robust, well-formed and symmetrical body (I. 1. 9-11). Such a body was developed through physical exercises (*vyāvāma-śikṣā*, VI. 43. 20), hunting (*mṛgayā*, I. 18. 31) and training in military arts. The soldiers of Daśaratha are described as clever, chivalrous, who kept themselves fit by regular hunting expeditions and fighting unarmed with wild beasts and often killing them (I. 5. 21).

The entire military science and art of the age seems to have been comprehended by the generic term *Dhanurveda* (I. 18. 37), the term *dhanu* (bow) being regarded as symbolic of weapons in general and methods of warfare. It primarily comprised skill in archery including the *śabdavedha-vidyā* or the art of divining the target by its sound (I. 26. 24; II. 63. 23). Thus *Dhanurveda* includes instruction in the use of all known weapons. In this sense, it is the same as *astra-śikṣā* or the art of handling missiles, and comprised the acquirement (*saṁgrahaṇa*, I 27. 23), the restraint (*saṁhāra*, I. 28. 3) and the frustration or foiling (*parivāraṇa* or *nivāriṇa*, VI. 90. 57) of the enemy's weapons (I. 27. 23 ; 28. 3 ; VI. 90. 57). Indrajit is described as possessed of lightness of hand (*pāṇi-lāghavam*, VI. 90. 17). The soldiers of Ayodhyā are called *laghu-hastāḥ* (I. 5. 20), deft of hand. Proficiency in the *Dhanurveda*, to be acquired under the eyes of a preceptor, was to be supplemented by practical training in the various methods of warfare. The heir-apparent was associated with senior military officers to get familiarity with military operations : Aṅgada (IV. 29. 33) and Rāma (II. 2. 36-7) as princes were actively associated with military campaigns. Soldiers received training in *bāhu-yuddha* or *malla-yuddha* (wrestling) and *gadā-yuddha* (mace-fighting) as well.

Military education was made up of several arts connected with the traditional divisions of the ancient Indian army (*caturaṅga*, I. 20. 10) : *viz*., the horse, the infantry, the elephant and the chariot, and equipped the learner with skill in the riding (*āroha*) and training (*vinaya*) of horses and elephants and the driving of war-chariots (*ratha-caryā*) (I. 18. 27). When Indrajit's charioteer was killed by Lakṣmaṇa, Indrajit himself both steered the chariot and fought to the astonishment of the beholders (VI. 89. 43). Charioteering was developed as a great art. The *sūtas*, or hereditary charioteers at the

Rākṣasa court, designated as *ratha-kuṭumbins* (chariot-wardens), underwent special training for their composite profession (VI. 104. 18-20).

On the intellectual plane, education included knowledge of all the known literature of the day, *viz.*, scriptural, literary and the fine arts, economics (*vārtā*) and polity (*nīti* or *naya*). Veda occupied the foremost position in scriptural learning ; the *Ṛgveda*, the *Yajurveda* and the *Sāmaveda* (IV. 3. 28) are mentioned by name in the epic. The Ādityahṛdaya hymn describes Āditya as proficient in these three (*ṛg-yajuṣ-sāma-pāragaḥ*, VI. 105. 13). There is also a reference to *Atharvaśiras* (I. 15. 2). The month of Bhādra is described by Rāma to be the proper time of studying for those Brāhmaṇas whose profession it is to chant the *Sāmaveda* (IV. 28. 54). Next to the Vedas came the six auxiliaries—*viz.*, phonetics, rituals, etymology, grammar, metrics and astronomy (*ṣadaṅga*, I. 5. 23).

The study of literature included *kāvya* (poetry, I. 4. 7), *ākhyāna* (I. 4. 26) and *purāṇa* (legendary and mythic lore, VI. 113. 41), *vyāmiśrakas* (mixed dialects, II. 1. 27), *itihāsa* (traditional history, VI. 128. 114) and *ānvīkṣikī* (logic, VII. 94. 8). Judging from the frequent allusions to the arts of painting, music and dancing, it may be concluded that fine arts (*vaihārika-śilpa*) formed an important part of the cultural learning of the day.

Economics, which is of great antiquity in India, emerged very early as a special branch of learning under the name *vārtā* (II. 100. 47), dealing with agriculture, trade and cattle-rearing. It is implied in the use of the expression *tisraḥ vidyāḥ* (II. 100. 68), which points to the inference that *vārtā* crystallized as a branch of learning most probably in the early epic period.

The Rāmāyaṇa also refers to *arthaśāstra* (VI. 63. 15), the science of material concerns. *Arthaśāstra* too deals with wealth, but as good government is the *sine qua non* of peaceful acquisition of wealth (II. 67) ; in other words, as "politics and economics go hand in hand," *arthaśāstra* treats of polity also. *Arthaśāstra* is thus concerned with the economic development of a country in close co-operation with polity or *daṇḍanīti* for creating (and maintaining) conditions precedent to economic development (Kauṭilya, Book I). So, the relation between *vārtā* and *arthaśāstra* appears to be such that while the former stood for the general branch of learning treating of wealth alone, the latter dealt with it in association with polity and other subjects having more or less intimate connection with *vārtā* and *daṇḍanīti*.[1]

Polity was known as *nīti* (VII. 94. 10), *naya* (VI. 63. 5) or *rājanīti* (V. 35. 13). Rāma, who had acquired practical training in politics by helping the king, his father, in the administration of the State, was proficient in *rājanīti*. This political training he got in anticipation of coronation. On the other hand, Bharata, who was often away from Ayodhyā at the court of his maternal uncle at Kekaya, must have been unfamiliar with the actual polity of Kosala. This explains Rāma's insistence on Bharata at Citrakūṭa for paying special attention to the study of the science of polity, to the educational attainments of the ministers, counsellors, courtiers and ambassadors and to the troublesome heresies of *lokāyatikas* or popular sophistic philosophers (II. 100. 16-7, 22-4, 35, 38-9).

The wide diffusion of political education in the land can be gauged from the interest taken by the people in State affairs. At every turn, the ministers, learned men and principal officers of the army are shown as counselling together and shaping the destinies of the State. On important occasions, people from different parts of the country assembled and participated in these discussions. When the question of

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[1] See N. Law : *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, pp. 73-5.

Rāma's installation as *yuvarāja* arose, there was an exceptionally large gathering in Daśaratha's assembly. When the king invited their opinion on his proposal to instal Rāma on the throne, the leaders, the citizens and the inhabitants of various provinces are said to have taken counsel together and given their unanimous assent (II. 2. 19-20).

Besides physical and intellectual education, there also existed important branches of useful and professional education. Medical science was widely diffused in the age. Knowledge of anatomy, herbs and animal diseases was prevalent. Astrologers and astronomers were in great demand. Evidently, provision must have existed for imparting this knowledge, too. The flourishing condition of trade and commerce presupposes the imparting of some kind of commercial learning. The numerous kinds of artisans that carried on their flourishing trades in the country postulate some sort of training in arts and crafts.

Moral education was by no means neglected. Good character meaning firm adherence to truth and duty, cleanliness of body and mind and perfect control over the senses constituted the distinguishing features of a man of true education. The words of advice, which Daśaratha addressed to Rāma before his proposed installation on the throne, embody the ethical standard prevailing in the age. Said he: "By nature and inclination, you are both modest and excellent. Though your gifts need no counsel, my love suggests these friendly words. Practising still greater humility, do you constantly restrain your senses. Keep far from the evils that spring from love and anger. Pursue your noble course, alike in secret as well as in the open. Strain every nerve to gain the love of ministers as well as subjects. Storing the arsenals and the treasury with arms and gold, he who sees his thriving people satisfied and rules the earth accordingly, in him do friends rejoice just like celestials on attaining the nectar. Therefore, O son, maintain your course refraining from all evil" (II. 3. 41-6).

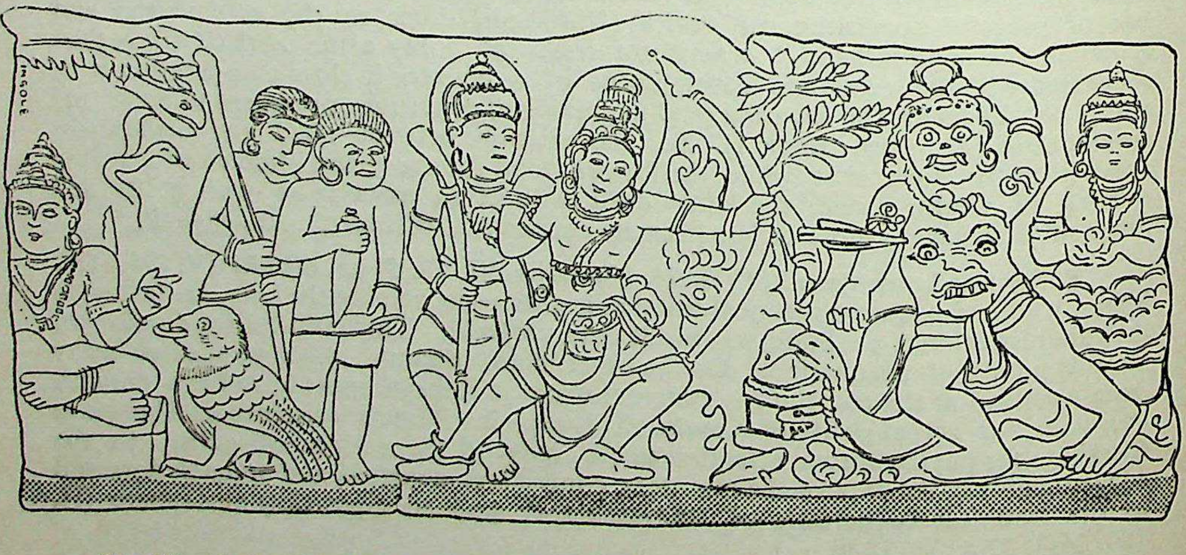

Fig. 50. (*Left*) The dying Jaṭāyu passing Sītā's ring to (Rāma and) Lakṣmaṇa (*Right*) Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa fighting with Kabandha : Prambanan, Java, ninth century A D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Evidence is available of the cultivation of some occult sciences also. When Rāma was placed under the charge of Viśvāmitra, he received instruction in what were technically known as *balā* and *atibalā vidyās*, or the sciences of power—natural and supernatural. The sage thus expounded to Rāma the marvellous efficacy of these sciences: "(By acquiring these) there shall be no weariness for you, nor any anxiety nor any change of form. The demons will not be able to overwhelm you even if you are asleep or careless. There shall be none in the world to equal you in the prowess of your arms. In all the three worlds, there shall be none equal to you in fortune or in tact or in knowledge, in firm intelligence or in ready retort. *Balā* and *atibalā* are, as it were, the mothers of all wisdom. Hunger and thirst you will no more have if you repeat *balā* and *atibalā* on the way. When you master these two *vidyās*, you shall get unequalled renown. These two sciences are the offspring of the Prajāpati and are productive of great energy. I wish to bestow them on you, O Kākutstha, because you are, indeed, worthy of them" (I. 22. 13-21). Thereupon Rāma, having undergone a preparatory ceremony, read the *vidyās* with him and studied them. From the context it appears that while one of these was a collection of Vedic hymns (*mantra-grāma*) consisting of charms and incantations of an Atharvavedic nature to ensure glory, success and strength in battle, the other constituted mystic hymns, of Upaniṣadic and Atharvavedic character again, which were calculated to give the trainee philosophic knowledge, subtle apprehension and capacity for dissertations (*jñāne, buddhiniścaye, uttare prativaktavye*). It is quite likely that what Rāma really learnt and came to realize here was the Atharvaveda itself complete in both its parts, philosophical as well as magical traditions of the land, as known in his days.[1]

Among other occult sciences of the age, *svacchanda-bala-gāminī vidyā* (III. 17. 25) was the art or power to go anywhere at will. Śūrpaṇakhā boasted of being a possessor of this *vidyā*. *Sarva-bhūta-ruta vidyā* (II. 35. 19) was the power of understanding the import of sounds emitted by all creatures. Kaikeyī's father, proficient in this science, could understand the "speech" even of birds and beasts. *Cakṣuṣmatī vidyā* (IV. 58. 29) consisted of "distant vision" extending over 100 *yojanas*.[2] This was a special accomplishment of the order of Gṛdhras, enabling them to descry their prey over a hundred *yojanas* around (IV. 58. 29-30). *Kāma-rūpa-dhāriṇī vidyā* (VII. 24. 40) was the power of assuming forms at will. The Vānaras and the Rākṣasas were especially conversant with this. *Bhūtavināśinī vidyā* (VII. 66. 6) granted protection from all evil spirits. In the Uttarakāṇḍa, Vālmīki extended this protection to the new-born babes of Sītā. *Trikālajñatā vidyā* (*cf.* I. 3. 6) was knowledge of the past, the present and the future as one unbroken stream. Vālmīki is said to have mastered it.

Since writing was rare, and printing and paper were unknown, the only method of teaching was oral instruction which was found to be the cheapest and the most accurate. Care was taken to train and develop memory power in order to ensure that the knowledge acquired in boyhood should last through life. The Vedas were kept enshrined in memory so that there might be no change or tampering.

The entire Rāmāyaṇa was memorized by Kuśa and Lava, and was faithfully reproduced by them before assemblies of learned men (I. 4. 12-3). No digests or notes are in evidence in the *āśrama*-schools of the day. This oral method of instruction necessarily made teaching direct and personal without even a text-book intervening.[3]

A popular method of imparting instruction in moral and religious education was the narration of entertaining stories (*kathās*) of ethical import (I. 23. 22). These stories of distinguished men and women of the past were handed down by tradition, and the forest-dwelling hermits constituted a veritable storehouse of them. They narrated these tales to their disciples and made them familiar with the traditional lore of the day. The *kathā*-style of teaching had a number of advantages. It was an admirable medium clothing knowledge in an attractive garb (of stories). It entertained the pupils (*ramayāmāsa*, I. 23. 22), never burdening their intellect, yet serving as a constant spur to their avidity to learn more and more. It helped the teacher in cultivating an ingenious capacity for surprise and interest which is one of the principal secrets of successful teaching. The abstruse truths of philosophy, religion and ethics could be made easily digestible by illustrating them with the lives of renowned heroes and sages of bygone times. These advantages of the *kathā*-method are best exemplified by the manner in which Viśvāmitra contributed to the edification and enlightenment of Rāma in the forest (I. 22-47).

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[1] S. C. Sarkar : *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7.
[2] For an explanation of the term *yojana*, see chapter XVIII.
[3] A. S. Altekar : *op. cit.*, p. 156.

Recitation (*pātha*, V. 59. 31) aloud of the scriptures, usually in the morning, was another widely adopted form of learning sacred texts. Andhamuni, lamenting over the death of his only son, bewailed : "From whom shall I hear, in the small hours of the morning, Scriptures sweetly read in a way carrying lasting impression in the listener's mind ?" (II. 64. 32). The air used to resound with the recitation of hymns in Vedic schools (III. 1. 6). The hymns had to be recited with the precise intonation and accents as traditionally came down (*yathāśāstram*, II. 76. 18; I. 14. 8) to achieve full results. A peculiar sanctity was attached to mere recitation of texts handed down since time immemorial in India. Vālmīki attaches high terrestrial and spiritual efficacy to the recitation of the Rāmāyaṇa (I. 1. 99-100; VI. 128. 105-22).

Svādhyāya (II. 32. 19), or daily recapitulation or revising of the acquired lessons, was highly efficacious in keeping alive the knowledge once gained. This was especially necessary when books were unknown. That is why even advanced students like Nārada are described as ever devoted to the *svādhyāya* of the Vedas (I. 1. 1). It was fully realized that learning, as everything else, tended to decline for want of practice (V. 15. 38). *Svādhyāya* was self-study and, as such, was carried by the pupil independently of the teacher's help. In other .words, it was constant practice or *upāsanam* (II. 67. 21) of one's lessons. It has been described how archers carried their skill to perfection by a constant doting on their art (II. 67. 21). The *brahmacārins* whom Rāma gratified with profuse wealth before departing to the forest had no other business except the *svādhyāya* of the Vedas (II. 32. 19). Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, it is said, was so devoted to his filial duties and to penance and *svādhyāya* that he had no sex urges at all.

Above all, learned discussions appear to have been a normal and important feature of scholastic life, and young students were avid to come out successful in them. Such debates took place during intervals of sacrificial sessions (I. 14. 19). Rāma, during intervals of his martial exercises, always discussed with persons of character and wisdom, experience and virtue (II. 1. 12). In well-governed States, men versed in scriptures used to resort to forests and gardens, and deliberating on their respective systems enter into discussion with those who differed with them (II. 67. 26). Reasoning and analysis thus formed the crux of such a method of learning through discussion. Such debates, which later came to be known as *śāstrārthas*, played an important role in the literary training of students.

The fact that the entire Rāmāyaṇa had to be committed to memory by Kuśa and Lava does not, however, necessarily prove non-existence of writing. It proves rather that the ancients attached more importance to the cultivation of memory than to leaf or bark manuscripts.[1] In the *phala-śruti* as the end of the Yuddhakāṇḍa, great religious merit is attached to the writing (or copying down) of the Rāmāyaṇa (VI. 128. 120). Reference is also made to the reading of the epic (VI. 128. 114, 116). There is, again, a reference to reading among the sports indulged in by the Vānaras at Madhuvana (V. 61. 16). From these evidences, it can be concluded that writing of some sort was in vogue (though it might not have been in any advanced stage) in ancient India when the Rāmāyaṇa was composed. A personal use of writing was inscription of one's name on weapons and personal articles. Rāma's name was engraved on the ring which he sent to Sītā through Hanumān (IV. 44. 12 ; V. 36. 2). The custom of heroes having signed or marked arrows was common. When Rāvaṇa made advances towards Sītā in Laṅkā, she spurned him with the warning that ere long he would be riddled with arrows with the names of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa marked on them (V. 21. 25). Vālmīki describes the entire battle-field of Laṅkā as covered with the arrows bearing the name of Rāma (VI. 44. 23). Several Rākṣasa heroes spoke of how their bodies would be riven asunder by arrows bearing Rāma's name (VI. 64. 25).

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[1] See A. C. Das : *The Art of Writing in Ancient India.*

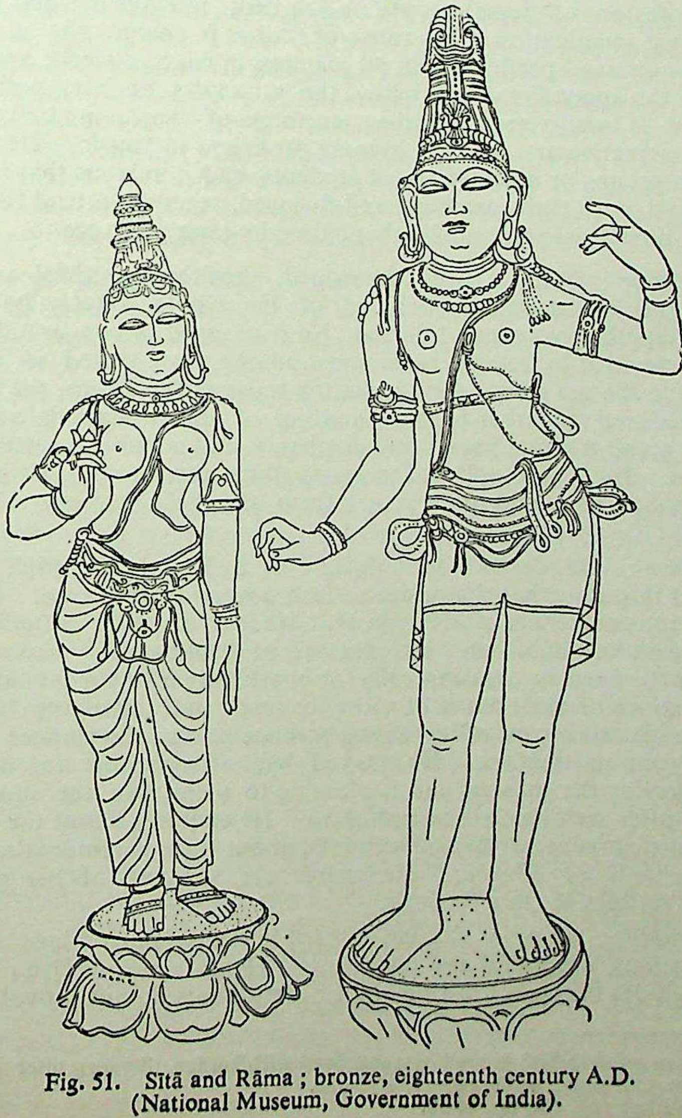

Fig. 51. Sītā and Rāma ; bronze, eighteenth century A.D. (National Museum, Government of India).

Rāma was the beau ideal of an educated and cultured man in the Rāmāyaṇa age. His education serves as the model of an all-round training imparted to princes in the early epic period. His whole life is verily an epitome of the best ideals of the age.

Rāma was about thirty years of age when Daśaratha proposed to instal him on the throne.[1] His educational attainments are recounted by the poet on this occasion as being sufficient justification for his selection by the king and the people alike (II. 1-2). A close study of this will show how thorough and versatile his training had been as a prince.[2]

As an intellectual : He is trained (*abhivinīta*) by initiated elders skilled in *dharma* and *artha* (law and polity). He attends upon elderly and well-learned Brāhmaṇas and, in the intervals of martial exercises, always discourses with the good, the virtuous and the aged. He is able to discourse in chains of arguments like a Vācaspati (traditional master or professor of logic). He is learned, intelligent, and has a good memory and vivid imagination. His range of studies is complete in all branches of learning, he has attained proficiency in all sciences, in mixed dialects, and duly learned the Vedas with the appendices. He knows the principles of law, polity as well as of erotics, and is well-versed in the customs of the community or society. He knows the recreative arts and has become proficient in music. He continues to be interested in groups or associations of students, and is anxious that (as in his own time) they should, with their armours well-fastened, regularly attend the lectures and instructions of their teachers, unfailingly abiding by their guidance.

As a warrior : With a fully developed, healthy, youthful and impressive personality, Rāma has become the beloved of the whole country by virtue of his superhuman strength, prowess and daring. He is engaged in regular military exercises (with intervals devoted to letters), is foremost among those versed in the art of the bow, is skilled in the use of weapons including those of the Devas, the Asuras and of men, and excels even his father in the handling of these weapons and missiles, is skilled in riding and training horses and elephants, and is publicly rated as a first-class chariot warrior. He is accomplished in marshalling the forces. Going to war on chariot or elephant, he would never return from the field without winning. He is invincible.

As a prince : He deems the vocation of a Kṣatriya of highest merit, being convinced that this alone has the power to lead a warrior to heaven. He has inherited the inclinations and traits of his dynasty. He is a chastiser of offenders, but is never angry with the innocent. His pleasure or displeasure is never ineffective; he can discern justly when an occasion calls for chastisement or for favour. He is able to scent the intentions of men, but is of close counsel (not divulging his knowledge). He knows the various means of increasing revenue as also the manner of spending or investing as "seen" in treatises. He is loved by, and agreeable to, the citizens, is intent on protecting the subjects and is pleasing to them like the moon. He seeks pleasure only after seeking *dharma* and *artha*. He enquires about the welfare of the citizens, about their sons, wives and servants, about their ceremonials, and of pupils studying in schools or *āśramas.* He shares the sorrows of his people in their adversity and rejoices in their festivals.

As a moralist : He never engages himself in inauspicious things, seeks no wrong, and is unmalicious, unspiteful and unenvious. He does not indulge in improper talk; he always preludes his speech with a smile ; even taunts do not provoke a harsh reply from him ; he speaks softly and talks no ill. He is of anger subdued, resembles a mountain in endurance, and is grateful, being gratified with a trifling benefit forgetting even a hundred injuries. Though polite and saintly, he is yet incapable of being disregarded by anyone ; he is mild yet firm-willed, powerful yet not vain of his own great prowess. He is truthful, commiserating with the destitute and wholly established in virtue. He is aware of his own shortcomings as well as of others ; speaks true yet fair of all and is not a slave of time or tradition. He has a steady and calm soul ; he is serene and sober (his feelings ever subdued) ; he is never glad or angry over little things ; he knows the proper time for enjoying as well as for renouncing things. He is not lethargic, nor heedless. He can grasp virtue and profit at the same time, and he follows pleasure without being idle or self-indulgent. His senses are completely subjugated.

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[1] Rāma was married to Sītā in his 17th year, lived with her for 12 years after marriage and was exiled in the 13th year; so his age—17+13=30.

[2] See S. C. Sarkar : *op. cit.*, pp. 44-58.

It will be noticed that this education is mainly literary, rhetorical, philosophic, artistic and sociological, with a bit of economics and mathematics. The subject of erotics, which is included in Rāma's courses of study, finds recognition as an item of education nowhere in the traditions of the world save in India so early ; while the importance of fine speech and sophistic discourse affords a Hellenistic parallel under the title 'rhetorics.' As regards physical and martial exercises, there is a regular scheme of soldierly exercises (with intervals otherwise utilized), the result being a fully developed physique, strong yet graceful. In a wider sense, these were the requirements of a truly good prince expected to succeed his father to the throne.

When Rāma's proposed coronation unexpectedly resulted in his exile, his father lamented : "Emaciated by studies in the Vedas, by severe courses of academic discipline and by apprenticeship to many a teacher, alas, Rāma is again to undergo a life of great toil and hardship (by this forest exile) at this well-earned time for enjoyment" (II. 12. 84). This shows that Rāma, till then was yet assiduously engaged in studies, whose toils were to cease on installation as crown prince. The fact that his armours and weapons used to be kept in the school (*sadman*) of his *ācārya*, and that these were taken out from his custody when he set out for exile, would show that Rāma at thirty was still taking regular military exercise. The fact that he, before departing to the forest, distributed his wealth among several teachers and students of Vedic schools by inviting them to his house (II. 32), too, indicates that the Prince was still in close touch with his schools and teachers though he had completed his course of study. From his discourse on the various topics to Bharata, at Citrakūṭa (II. 100), it can be easily inferred that Rāma was critical about the schools of the heterodox *lokāyatikas* and was specially interested in philosophy, rituals, polity, *dharmaśāstra*, the Vedas, *arthaśāstra,* military affairs, details of administration and statecraft, and the conflicts between dialecticians or sophists and orthodox schools. The entire discourse is a brilliant testimony to Rāma's catholic education and versatile talents.

During exile, again, Rāma came into contact with teachers of several Vedic *āśramas*. At Agastya's *āśrama*, he learnt the Vedic way of using certain weapons with special *mantras* (III. 12; VI. 108. 14). He evidently developed a bias for scholarship and erudition under the special circumstances of his life. When, bereft of Sītā, he soliloquizes on Mount Ṛṣyamūka, the scenery of the Deccan Hills in the month of Prauṣṭhapada rouses in him reminiscences of the scholastic life until recently so familiar to him (IV. 28. 10). Hanumān's description of Rāma's education before Sītā at Laṅkā, too, may be taken as another index to his studies during exile. The detailed description (V. 35. 15-20) of the points of excellence of his different limbs shows the great care still bestowed (at forty-three !) on the development of bodily powers and graces.

Rāma was forty-four when he ascended to the throne at Ayodhyā, and it is the description of this Rāma that Nārada gives to Vālmīki at the latter's *āśrama* (I. 1).

Nārada says that Rāma comes up to Vālmīki's ideal of a perfect man, and suggests him as a fit subject for the epic. An analysis of Nārada's sketch discloses that Rāma had attained at this time his full stature as a cultured Aryan king. Even after this, in the Uttarakāṇḍa, in spite of his State preoccupations, he was more concerned with the sumptuous receptions of *ṛṣis* and their pupils at court, with visits to *āśramas* within his sphere of influence, and with maintaining their rights and privileges against rival orders (VII. 74-6). Throughout the latter part of his life, schools and schoolmen were prominently associated with him—more than princes, warriors and courtiers (VII. 1, 37, 61, 73, 91-4). In fact, throughout his life, Rāma lived, moved and 'had his being' in the circles of the learned and the virtuous.

Rāma is presented by Vālmīki as an ideal man, possessor of all the virtues a man can possibly inherit or acquire. The versatile training he received enabled him to play a distinguished role in the various spheres of human activity. His catholic tastes and wide sympathies, his aesthetic sense and deep-rooted humanity, saved his life from being lop-sided and equipped him to influence contemporary life. His moral stamina at once singled him out from the common run of humanity. "But there is not the least suggestion that he possessed these qualities because he was divine and not because he underwent the necessary discipline laid down for ordinary men. If he developed subtle intelligence or philosophic wisdom and could excel in military feats or in answering controversialists or even in singing, it was only because he diligently engaged himself in the study of the respective subjects and in revering his seniors and preceptors."[1]

As regards women's education, it should be noted that as marriage was obligatory for girls, most of them married at puberty and only a few continued their studies after that age. There were *sadyo-vadhūs* and there were *brahmavādinīs*: the education of the *sadyo-vadhūs* comprised the study of important Vedic hymns necessary for usual prayers and sacrifices, as instanced by Kausalyā, Tārā and Sītā, whereas *brahmavādinīs* remained unmarried and dedicated themselves to Vedic studies, sacrifices and penances, as instanced by the example of Svayaṁprabhā; and Vedavatī (in the Uttarakāṇḍa).

Question arises: Did women of the period also receive their education in *āśrama*-schools after the manner of men? The epic shows that the *āśramas* of those times had many well-educated female inmates, dedicated to the service of gods and engaged in theological studies. Svayaṁprabhā, daughter of Meru-sāvarṇi, lived in her father's *āśrama* not far from the hill-fort of Ṛkṣabila. She was the dear companion of Hemā, an expert singer and dancer; and the fort and palace of Ṛkṣabila, which Hemā had subsequently acquired by her marriage with Maya, was managed on her behalf by Svayaṁprabhā (IV. 51. 16-7). Hanumān's search party of Vānaras found in her an elderly but beautiful spinster in the garb of a *tāpasī*, clad in bark and deer skins, knowing all subjects and abiding by the rules of piety (IV. 52. 18, 21 ; 51. 1). Hemā herself, apart from her musical and artistic accomplishments, may have been otherwise fairly educated. It is possible that in Meru-sāvarṇi's *āśrama*, grown-up unmarried girls were taught ordinary subjects as well as the arts (IV. 51).

A prototype of Svayaṁprabhā is Vedavatī whose account is given at length in the Uttarakāṇḍa (canto 17). Her father, Kuśadhvaja, while he was a prince, had become a *brahmarṣi* or Vedic teacher, ever engaged in *vedābhyāsa* (study and recitation of the Vedas); so he named his daughter Vedavatī, who also grew up to be *vāṅmayī*, a veritable embodiment of learning as it were, Divine *Vāk* or Logos personified. After her father's death, Vedavatī continued a life of religious discipline in an *āśrama* close to the Himālayas in the Mithilā territory, clad in deer skin and wearing matted locks, and employed, in the manner of *ṛṣis*, in study and learning (*ārṣeṇa vidhinā yuktā*). It is clear from this account that princess Vedavatī, in accordance with the tradition of learning in her family, was given the highest literary and theological education possible in an *āśrama*.

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[1] *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. ii, p. 46.

Again, Ahalyā, it is said, was placed in the charge of Gautama at his *āśrama* (*nyāsa-bhutā nyastā*) who, after many years, sent her back to her parents (*niryātitā*), evidently fully trained and disciplined. The firmness of Gautama's character, as also his success in *tapas* (study or teaching), thus proved, Ahalyā was bestowed on him to be "touched as a wife" (VII. 30. 26-7). Gautama's *āśrama* might, therefore, have been a co-educational institution, where girls were sent by their parents from distant parts of the country as resident-students for many years, and not infrequently some of these women students sometimes, eventually, married their tutors.[1]

As Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were informed by Kabandha, at the *āśrama* of Mataṅga near Pampā, there resided "even at the present day"[2] a long-lived woman (student?) of the Śabara clan (Śabarī), who had attended upon the great teachers of the *āśrama* and was anxiously awaiting Rāma's visit before she passed away. She was an old lady of charming speech (*cārubhāṣiṇī*), adhering to the path of virtue (*dharma-saṁsthitā*). She had all along been admitted to the studies of the *āśrama* in the highest branches of knowledge: *vijñāne nityam abahiskṛtā*, that is to say, she was taught the highest knowledge along with men students without any distinction. The *maharṣi* teachers, on whom she attended, had passed away, during these twelve years of Rāma's exile, at Citrakūṭa. With their death, their *āśrama*-school fell into decadence with Śabarī as a lone student in charge of it. Rāma enquired of her how far her attendance on teachers had been fruitful, and wished to know whether what he had previously heard about the power and influence of her teachers was correct. Śabarī thereupon proceeded with much feeling to show the princes round the *āśrama* area to inspect its relics and associations. Having accomplished her this last desire, Jaṭilā (which was probably Śabarī's proper name), clad in robes of *cīra* and *kṛṣṇājina*, immolated herself on a kindled pyre, hoping thereby to be reunited with her teachers in heaven whom she so much revered (III. 73-4).

From the above account, a few significant conclusions bearing on female education may be deduced. Women of South-East India of the Rāmāyaṇa period could sometimes be educated as highly as men in the same institution. They could attain wide reputation for learning and influence in the outside world (III. 74. 10) and be in charge of an *āśrama* for years together through strenuous times. They tried to secure a revival of its prosperity by enlisting the support of princes from other regions. Śabarī, who had in fact dedicated her whole life to the service of her school, seems to have desired "more to enlist the sympathy of Rāma (by showing him the decadent condition of the *āśrama*) and, thus, to ensure the continuity and revival of her beloved old dwindling school under princely patronage than simply to have a view of his divine face as ordinarily supposed."[3]

In this connection, it would be pertinent to examine the facts which the Rāmāyaṇa furnishes about the education of Sītā, the model woman of the age. Greater part of Sītā's education was post-marital, influenced partly by her husband and partly by the special environments of her long periods of exile from court. All the same, her early years of maidenhood at her parental home were not completely barren, and she must have received some sort of elementary education. She must have been taught to read and write; she was certainly literate, for later we find her in Laṅkā reading and recognizing the engraved autograph of her huband on the Ring sent her through Hanumān (IV. 44. 12-3). From the fact of Hanumān deliberating over the language in which he should accost Sītā at the Aśoka grove in Laṅkā (V. 30. 17-9), it appears that she knew three kindred languages—the *mānuṣī*, the *dvijāti* and the *vānara*. She must have read besides a metrical Book of Animal Fables and committed a good deal of it to memory in her girlhood; for, in the course of her conversation with Hanumān, she refers to "puranic *ślokas* sung by Ṛkṣa" and quotes from memory (VI. 113. 41). While she was yet unmarried, a *śama-vṛttā bhikṣiṇī* (nun of restrained senses) is said to have come to her father's court and told her mother about her future life in forest retreats (II. 29. 13). As pointed out by Dr. S. C. Sarkar,[1] what this nun told Sītā's mother was clearly about the outstanding traits of Sītā's character as they appeared to her which, in her view, marked the girl out for a cloistered career in a forest retreat or a life in the midst of nature. There is no need of reading into this a mere prophecy of future exile, but rather an instance of recognition or discovery of a student type in a girl by a lady teacher. The truth of the *bhikṣiṇī*'s estimate is corroborated by the many consistent illustrations throughout the epic of Sītā's love for nature and *āśrama* surroundings as also by the learning and refinement she did acquire in the *āśramas* during her exile.

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[1] S. C. Sarkar: *op. cit.*, pp. 122-3.

[2] *Adyāpi*—showing that the *āśrama* was decaying or was on the point of abolition.

[3] S. C. Sarkar: *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Sītā, on her own testimony before Anasūyā, had received before her marriage instructions about wifely duties from her mother and other relatives (II. 118. 8-9), which were supplemented by lessons from *śruti* or traditional lore about the undying character of a marriage alliance from famous Brāhmaṇas (II. 29.17). It is not stated whether these famous scholars were her private tutors or just teachers in the *āśramas* she visited. The said instruction in her wifely duties was continued also under her mother-in-law (II. 118. 7). Besides, Sītā must have obtained, at her father's house, a grounding in Vedic *mantras* and in a queen's duties towards a state (*rāja-dharma*, II. 26. 4).

Like her mother-in-law, Sītā was in active touch with educational institutions at Ayodhyā—a fact which alone can explain the intimate relationship of a *sakhī* (lady-friend) existing between Sītā and Suyajña's wife. Sītā made presents of her personal jewellery to her *sakhī* before leaving with her husband for the forest (II. 32. 6-11).

Long periods of residence in the midst of teachers and students of *āśramas* contributed to the general make-up of Sītā's personality. "Her craving for the delightful and serene surroundings of the *āśramas*, and the ennobling, genial company of the inmates thereof—renowned sages and bright students, venerable matrons and sweets girls—was satisfied yet not satiated by her twelve or thirteen years' sojourn in various *āśrama* settlements."[2] In constant association with her extraordinary husband, "hers must have been an enviable unfolding of womanhood, sweetened by nature, brightened by culture and sustained by love."[3]

Thus, after twelve years of *āśrama*-residence, Sītā could pride herself on being a *paṇḍitā*, a learned lady; though to Rāvaṇa, she was a *paṇḍita-māninī* (vainglorious lady) and a *mūḍhā* (fool) besides, to reject his offer of becoming his conso t (III. 49. 13-4). There were several occasions during her captivity (following immediately on her residence in the *āśramas*) which show incidentally that she had in the course of these long years become a fairly learned woman. Her allusions to obstetric surgery (V. 28. 6) while conversing with Hanumān testifies to her acquaintance with scientific dissection of foetus (in abnormal maternity cases conducted by the *āśrama*

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1. *Op. cit.*, p. 63.
2. *Op. cit.*, p. 66.
3. *Op. cit.*

surgeon). Sītā herself uses a language befitting a *paṇḍitā*. She considers herself a fit consort of Rāma alone, just as *vidyā* or highest knowledge belongs only to one who is *vrata-snāta* and *viditātmā* (*i.e.*, one who has come back to home-life duly after the ceremonial bath concluding his course of studies including the doctrine of *ātman*) (V. 21. 17). She is positively sure that she cannot give her love to Rāvaṇa even as an initiated person cannot think of conferring knowledge of Vedic texts on the uninitiated (V. 28. 5). That Hanumān thought it pertinent to give her a detailed account of her husband's education and special attainments (V. 35), shows that "she must have come to know the nature of school studies sufficiently well to understand and estimate the elements of an average high education."[1] Her appreciation of finding in Hanumān a harmonious (*śobhana*) blend of certain specific physical, intellectual and moral excellences, and of his ideal speech indicative of complete (eightfold) development of the process of understanding (VI. 113. 24-6), shows that she was thoroughly conversant with the professional knowledge of the teachers of her time. Here, again, the description of Sītā's bearing in education and culture indicates the general level attained by well-bred ladies in these spheres.

At the time of her final banishment, as related in the Uttarakāṇḍa, Sītā was advised by Lakṣmaṇa to spend her exile in residence with Vālmīki who was a famous *muni* and a great friend of her father-in-law (VII. 47. 15-7). Her dignity, restraint and fortitude on the occasion would become an educated lady in the truest sense. Vālmīki assured her that the *tāpasīs* (nuns and lady-students), abiding by *tapas* (study and penance) at a little distance from his *āśrama*, would ever cherish her as one of themselves (VII. 49 11). Thus, once again, after a brief gap of two or three eventful and stormy years, Sītā was thrown back upon the serene *āśrama* life she craved for, "but this time without the leaven of the joys of love." Most of her time must have been taken up by pining for her lost love and honour, by vows and penances (VII. 47. 17-8), and also by the care and upbringing of her children. It was perhaps Sītā's tragic life, and her presence in the *āśrama*, that suggested to Vālmīki the theme of his epic, and she must have been employed in a great labour of love in assisting Vālmīki at his work by supplying him with the details of Rāma's "life-story."

Coming to the aims and ideals of education held in the age, it is clear that education included, first of all, the building up of a sound physique, so as to enable the student to defend himself (and the culture he stood for) against assault. Ancient Indians always advocated the principle of a sound mind in a sound body. One must certainly care for the body, because without its health and strength one cannot discharge one's duties in life (VII. 56. 8-9). Rāma's strong physique and military training enabled him not only to redeem the honour of his family by recovering Sītā from an alien's clutches, but also to become propagator and saviour of the religion and culture of his times (I. 26. 4-5).

And thus, the ideal of education consisted not in specialization but in versatility. Its object was to enable one to see life steadily and see it whole. Rāma touched life at many points, because he had studied different branches of knowledge calculated to enable him to fill a distinguished niche in many a walk of life. That the ideal of versatility was well within the scheme of Rākṣasa education as well, is apparent from Rāvaṇa's praise of Indrajit as being protected not only by the might of his arms but also by his intellectual discipline (*tapas*), no well-thought-out counsel of diplomacy or statecraft being beyond his comprehension (V. 48. 4-5). Indeed, Rāvaṇa wanted to combine the two ideals of knowledge and heroic action in his sons ; even so, he reminds Indrajit that the life and duties of the ruling classes (the Kṣatriya's *rājadharma*) require that proficiency in the different branches of learning is essential along with that in the arts of war and that, while understanding and knowledge are necessary, victory in war is also desirable (V. 48. 13-4). A number of other sons and relations of Rāvaṇa, who went forth to battle together, were all experienced in warfare and had mastered the arts of ruses and strategies ; they knew the science of arms and also possessed knowledge of the highest philosophy (VI. 69. 11-3).

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[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

It must be remembered that education was not merely book-learning or erudition. The latter was of little worth if the student could not develop an insight into things (II. 1. 22) and obtain illumination from an observation of actual life. Rāma is described as *sāragrāhī*, one who could see the essence of things (III. 67. 1). Scolding Śuka and Sāraṇa on their unsuccessful mission, Rāvaṇa says : "You have in vain attended on your teachers, and on aged people and parents, in that you have failed to take in the essence of the *rājaśāstras* ; even if you have taken this in, you have not known it well, you only bear the burden of knowledge and not its spirit. With such ignorant councillors about, I am lucky enough not to have been ruined" (VI. 29. 9-10). Clearly, Rāvaṇa regarded a bookish schooling without development of practical ability as equivalent to ignorance or worse. Lakṣmaṇa, who like Rāma was trained to be a man of deeds more than of words, denounces the speech of Atikāya, a son of Rāvaṇa, in these words : "By words alone you can never be great, by boasting one does not become good ; show yourself in action instead of bragging ; a man of might alone is the real knight" (VI. 71. 58-9). So also to Indrajit he says : "He alone is wise that compasseth business by acts but thou, incompetent, deemest thyself successful by 'realizing' thy aim in word only; display thy prowess, not words" (VI. 88. 13-6). This compares with Rāma's retort to Khara's son, Makarākṣa : "What is the use of idle prating ? Success is obtained not by vain words but by heroic action" (VI. 79. 18).

Culture, not scholarship, was the main aim of education in ancient India. Education should give the student proper notions of cleanliness and etiquette, should endow him with humility and make him more amenable to his fellow citizens. It should make him more reasonable, considerate and courteous, and bring him out as a thorough gentleman, a man of culture. When Rāma enquires of Bharata at Citrakūṭa, "Have thy knowledge and learning borne fruit ?", he evidently wants to know whether his younger brother had cultivated meekness and humility as the crowning glories of his education (II. 100. 72).

Education did not circumscribe the individual's outlook by any set theory or dogma held by the ruling classes, but allowed free latitude to the people in the expression of their views and thoughts, however heterodox or unpalatable they might be. Jābāli propounded the tenets of the atheistic school of the Cārvākas in the very presence of Rāma, a staunch adherent of the orthodox Vedic schools (II. 108) ; but Rāma coolly countered his arguments (II. 109) and did not at all think of gagging him for his unorthodox pronouncements. In the episode of Kaikeyī's wrangle for the installation of Bharata on the throne, several ministers like Vasiṣṭha (II. 37. 20-37), Sumantra (II. 35) and Siddhārtha (II. 36. 18-20) vehemently condemned her selfish attitude. It is remarkable that they did so because of the likelihood of Kaikeyī's son succeeding Daśaratha to the throne. Even such an obstinate and wilful ruler as Rāvaṇa is represented as allowing free discussion in his assembly ; and not only Vibhīṣaṇa (VI. 14), even Kumbhakarṇa (VI. 12. 28-34), each, vehemently criticized from a different, standpoint Rāvaṇa's conduct towards Sītā. Rāvaṇa's maternal uncle, Mālyavān, also spoke frankly in the assembly and rebuked him for his dereliction of duly, addiction to carnal pleasures and unrighteous ways in general (VI. 35).

The religious and ethical tendency of Indian thought is nowhere more manifest than in the sphere of education. The education of the day could hardly be conceived without a thorough knowledge of Vedic scriptures and rituals. Strengthening of the moral aspect of the pupil's training were ever kept prominently in view. The atmosphere in which the student lived was calculated to give him a proper moral training. The infusion of a spirit of piety and righteousness, self-restraint and self-discipline, into the mind of the student was one of the basic aims of education, and its transmission at the hands of the *ṛṣis*, living a life of self-abnegation and religious discipline in forest retreats, made moral education not a matter of precept but one of concrete example. Evil effects of divorcing power from virtue, and intellectual attainments from moral and spiritual value, are illustrated in the example of Rāvaṇa whom few equalled in religious discussion, in social concerns or in visioning the right sense of scriptures (V. 52. 17), but who was a renegade from *dharma* and hence—a befitting contrast to Rāma—became the scourge of the times (V. 49. 17-9).

Education was thus deemed to be fruitless if it did not transform or ennoble one's nature (V. 52. 16). "The rituals which students occasionally performed and the prayers which they regularly offered every day were calculated to impress upon their mind the fact that student life was a life of consecration, and that its ideals could be realized only by those who did not swerve from the strict and narrow path of duty."[1] In the opening verses of the Rāmāyaṇa what Vālmīki really wants to know from Nārada is about a hero in whom he could find a harmonious development of body, mind and soul. Meritoriousness, valour, righteousness, gratefulness, truthfulness, firmness of vows, good conduct, desire for the welfare of all creatures, learning, proficiency, pleasing aspect, self-possession, freedom from anger or malice, splendour and fearful fury in battle go to constitute the Valmikian pattern of an ideal character (I. 1. 2-4), to which, according to Nārada, Rāma *is* the nearest approach.

The student, after completing his education, was not to lead a self-centred life but was to contribute in his own way to social well-being. At the conclusion of his formal studies Rāma, as a prince, made it a point to add to the joy and happiness of his fellow citizens (II. 2. 40-1). The importance of social duties was further emphasized by the ancient educationists by their theory of the three debts (*ṛṇāni trīṇi*, II. 106. 28), according to which every individual born in this world is born with debt to the gods, to the *ṛṣis* and to the forefathers which it is his bounded duty to discharge. By regular performance of sacrifices, by *svādhyāya* or study of the scriptures, and by raising progeny and imparting it proper education, one was believed to get absolved of these debts. This theory was highly serviceable in inculcating a sense of social responsibility into the *snātaka*, thereby making him a faithful custodian of the culture and traditions of his race.

There is close affinity between this education and the Athenian education of the fifth century B.C. and yet there are also certain marked differences between the Valmikian and the Hellenic ideals; inasmuch as the latter does not provide for scriptural or theosophic knowledge, and the conception of virtue lying in serenity attained by self-control, or in working out the predetermined conditions of each individual life, are quite foreign to it.[2] On the other hand, the Rāmāyaṇa education, by virtue of the fair balance and aptness involved in its scheme, concerned itself with the simultaneous and harmonious development of all the aspects of the student's personality. In so doing, it inevitably contributed to social happiness as well as of the individual.

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[1] A. S. Altekar : *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[2] S. C. Sarkar : *op. cit.*, p. 45.

CHAPTER XIII

LITERATURE

The literature of a period is admittedly the mirror of the way of life of that epoch. In fact, it is more inasmuch as it is the expression of the hopes and aspirations of an entire nation. Every generation has ideas and ways of expression of its own. The ideas may be traditional, borrowed from a previous generation; still, they may have a novelty peculiar to them, because motion as a universal principle embraces cultures and civilizations in its sweep, also because the mode of expression has become different. The Rāmāyaṇa seeks to elucidate the self same ideas of the Vedas (I. 4. 6), but arranged in a particular form and expressed in a fresh style. Vālmīki, by depicting the adventurous life of the Aryans—a glorious life set to enchanting music (I. 4. 8)—was able to realize the grand ideal of turning literature into an exquisite art. His introduction of life-like incidents and emotions, and his human outlook and treatment, served to make literature a source of pleasure and interest to the lay reader. The Rāmāyaṇa, obviously a narrative story (*ākhyāna*, I. 4. 26), essentially belongs to what may be called popular literature in Sanskrit. Vālmīki himself reveals his intention of setting the narration to recitation (I. 4. 9). That it was intended mainly for the masses is evident from many a circumstance (I. 4. 13). The benefits enumerated for the listeners and readers are, indeed, quite tempting (I. 1. 98-100 ; VI. 128. 116-9). The contents are engrossing and appealing to the average intellect. The style is simple and direct in the sense that it is less literary or artificial and more free or colloquial. This essentially popular standpoint has enabled Vālmīki to blend "art with life, pleasure with intelligence, beauty with morality, and ecstacy with divinity."

The early epic period was the first in the literary epochs of ancient India, when literature in its genuine sense was produced, an outstanding example whereof being the Rāmāyaṇa itself. If literature is "life expressed, life interpreted, life asserted and life made living," the Rāmāyaṇa is literature *par excellence*. An artist becomes a poet when he sees life as an expression, accommodation and assimilation; and the poet becomes an artist when he holds out for others, like a mirror, this vision of his. It is this mirror, this attempt to convey one's vision to others (I. 4. 18), that makes the Rāmāyaṇa genuine literature. The Rāmāyaṇa thus forms a landmark in the growth of Sanskrit literature inasmuch as it introduces a new vogue in its literary standards. What we now speak of as literary art in general could be said to have begun in India with the composition of his epic. "What with the Vedic sentiments growing dim, what with the mysteries invested and inscribed thereto by the *Brāhmaṇas*, what with the esoteric speculations of the *Upaniṣads* and what with the ponderous yet grand style of the *Sūtras*, men must have welcomed, applauded, encouraged and felt enraptured by literature like the epics, which could flow in easy narration, would ebb with emotions and charm with music (I. 4. 26, 17). What could be more pleasing and more comfortable to a people living in mystic horror of powerful surroundings than man depicted as a successful hero against all evil and inconvenient forces? That literature could be so stimulating and refreshing and fascinating was a new experience which was felt in all the first flush of enthusiasm."[1]

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1. R. V. Jagirdar : *Drama in Sanskrit Literature*, p. 6 (slightly modified).

Before scanning the Rāmāyaṇa (for gleaning facts about the literary creations of the period), it would be helpful to examine the position which Sanskrit occupied in the early epic age.

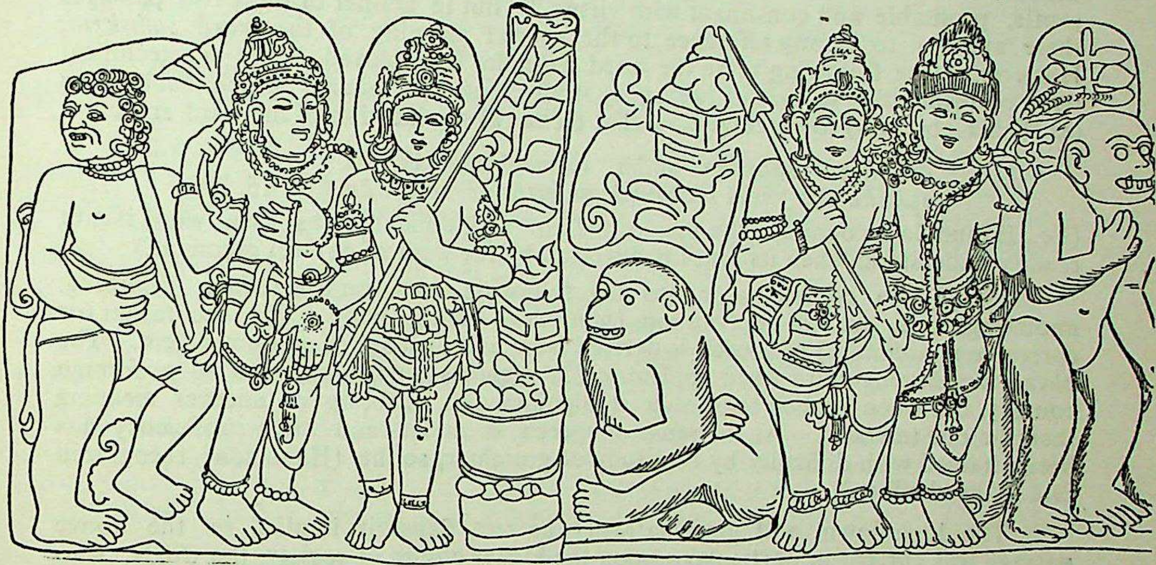

Fig. 52. (*Left*) Meeting between Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān. (*Right*) The two brothers and Hanumān each go their own ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Sanskrit was most probably a living language, because, as pointed out by Jacobi, an epic which claimed popularity could not have been composed in a dead language but in a language which was popular or which was as least understood by many.[1] Just as Buddha and Aśoka addressed themselves to the people in Pāli and Prākrit, the languages of the majority of the people, similarly Vālmīki must have composed his Rāmāyaṇa, which was meant for recital before large audiences in city and country (I. 4. 13), in a language (Sanskrit) which was widely spoken and understood.

The Uttarakaṇḍa states that Vālmīki instructed the wandering minstrels Kuśa and Lava to sing the poem in hermitages, in the abodes of Brāhmaṇas, in the streets, at sacrificial halls and palaces (VII. 93. 5). This shows that the language of the epic was well understood in such popular yet diverse places in the age of the Uttarakāṇḍa. The opening chapters of the Bālakāṇḍa state that the hermits listening to the recitation of the Rāmāyaṇa were highly pleased (I. 4. 16) and showered encomiums both at the excellent performance of the bards and the charming music and sweetness of the verses (I. 4. 17). They declared that the recitation of the songs actually pictured before their mental eyes the glorious chronicles of the by-gone past (I. 4. 18). This leaves no doubt about the prevalence of Sanskrit as a living language.

In the body of the original epic itself references are available as to the prevalence of Sanskrit as a spoken language. The demon Ilvala, wearing the guise of a Brāhmaṇa, invited Vipras to a *śrāddha*, speaking Sanskrit (III. 11. 56), which proves that Sanskrit was a spoken tongue and the normal vehicle of expression among the Brāhmaṇas. This language was called *saṁskṛtā* (V. 30. 18) or *saṁskṛtam* (III. 11. 56), which literally means polished or cultured and which the commentators explain as "refined by strict rules of grammar" (*vyākaraṇa-saṁskāra-yuktā*, V. 30. 18). In the Sundarakāṇḍa, the discourse of Prahasta, a Rākṣasa, is characterized as "polished (*saṁskṛtam*), supported by reason, and judicious in its import;" and in the Yuddhakāṇḍa, (the god) Brahmā is said to have addressed to Rāma a discourse which was "polished, sweet, gentle, profitable and consonant with virtue." But in neither of these two passages there appears to be any reference to the special meaning of the word *saṁskṛta*. However, in the following verse the word *saṁskāra* is employed, if not in a technical sense corresponding to that of *saṁksṛta*, at all events in a manner which enables us (as Weber observes) to perceive how that technical signification of the word arose :

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[1] H. Jacobi : *Das Rāmāyaṇa*, quoted in *A Bibliography of the Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 68.

> *duḥkhena bubudhe sītām hanumānanalaṅkṛtām* |
> *saṁskāreṇa yathā hīnām vācam arthāntaram gatām* || V. 15. 39

(*I.e.*, Hanumān recognized the unadorned Sītā with difficulty, just as a word is not readily understood when its sense is distorted by the want of correct grammar.)

The Tilaka commentator has the following note on this *śloka* : "Bathing, anointing, etc., are the decoration (*saṁskāra*) of the body. The decoration (or correctness, *saṁskāra*) of speech is derived from a knowledge of grammar, etc. The phrase *arthāntaragatatva* when applied to Sītā signifies her having gone to a foreign country, but when applied to speech it signifies the denoting of another meaning than the one intended. As the sense of speech is understood after proficiency has been attained with difficulty by the study of grammar, so he (Hanumān) recognized Sītā by hard effort."

The high-flown and grammatically correct Sanskrit implied in the above passage was current in particular among the higher circles of society, the *dvijas*, who may be said to be the *śiṣṭas* of Patañjali. Evidently, besides the language of the *dvijātis*, there appeared several varieties of Sanskrit in other spheres of society, which were of lesser purity and varying excellence according to the education of the speaker. The distinction between the higher Sanskrit (or the language of the *dvijātis*) and the vulgar or inferior type of Sanskrit is often referred to in the Rāmāyaṇa. The speech Vibhīṣaṇa delivered in Rāvaṇa's assembly is said to have been pregnant with thought and free from vulgarism (VI. 37. 6). This hints at Sanskrit having acquired an unrefined (*grāmya*) characteristic at particular places or with certain communities. The speech of sage Bharadvāja is described as marked by proper accent and uttered in consonance with phonetic rules (*śikṣā-svara-samāyuktam*, II 91. 22). When Hanumān delivers Sugrīva's message to Rāma, the latter is quite surprised at the purity of his language. Since Hanumān's knowledge of the Vedas and grammar is inferred as the reason for this purity (IV. 3. 28-9), it may be maintained that the knowers of the Vedas and students of grammar spoke a purer language than the rest, which is natural. At the same time, there is no indication that the language of the latter was a distinct speech in any way. The distinction consisted only in the degree of purity (IV. 3. 29). The purer or more refined dialect was called *saṁskṛta*. The relation corresponded strictly to that treated by Patañjali between the language of the *śiṣṭas* and the rest.[1]

When Hanumān meets Sītā in Laṅkā, he reflects on how he should speak to her : "...And a mere Vānara that I am, I shall speak in Sanskrit which ordinary men delight to use (*mānuṣī*). If I speak Sanskrit like a Brāhmaṇa (*dvijātiriva*), Sītā will be terrified, thinking I was Rāvaṇa. I must, therefore, use the language of the common man, or else I shall not be able to console the immaculate lady" (V. 30. 17-9).

The reason assigned in this passage, for not addressing Sītā as a Brāhmaṇa would, being not that she could not understand it but that it would alarm her and might seem unsuitable to the speaker in the eyes of the listener (Sītā), which indicates that higher Sanskrit, if not spoken by men and women of the upper classes, when the Rāmāyaṇa was composed, was at least understood by them and commonly spoken by the educated. Moreover, the epic here clearly recognizes and distinguishes between three dialects of Sanskrit which were in vogue at that time : *viz.*, *mānuṣī*, popular dialect of the masses (among the Aryans), *dvijāti*, the literary language spoken by cultured Brāhmaṇas, and *vānara*, perhaps the then corrupt Deccanese form of Sanskrit. This last was unintelligible to the Aryans ;[1] Sītā, naturally, (as Hanumān had rightly feared) could not have understood a word of it.

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[1] H. Jacobi : *Das Rāmāyaṇa*, astranslated in *A Bibliography of the Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 65-7.

The language of the Rāmāyaṇa is *mānuṣī*—epic or *ārṣa*—Sanskrit. It contains many linguistic deviations from the language as canonized by Pāṇini. Pāṇini does not notice these peculiarities evidently because he deals only with the refined Sanskrit of literary people, whereas the Rāmāyaṇa is written in the popular dialect of the wandering minstrels. It is likely that by the Mauryan age this popular dialect of the rhapsodists had become further modified into Prākrit to such an extent that the language of the Rāmāyaṇa, which was at one time intended for ordinary people, would be ill understood by people in Aśoka's time. Sanskrit, then, had lost its popularity and Pāli and Prākrit emerged on the scene.

In contrast with Sanskrit, the word *Prākrit*, in the sense of a dialect, is nowhere used in the epic, although there is frequent mention of *prākṛta nara* or the common man (II. 108. 2; 52. 16 ; VI. 116. 5). Nor would it be logical to see in the *mānuṣī* dialect a Prākrit speech, since it is expressly called *saṁskṛtā*.

Coming to the position of the various branches of literature current in the age, the Rāmāyaṇa period marked the advent and adoption of poetry as a recognized vehicle of literary art. It was preceded by the age of the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Sūtras*, to whose authors the loose and simple verses of the Vedic hymns had ceased to be attractive and who had, accordingly, adopted pure and simple prose and the concise and pregnant *sūtra* style for *their* medium of expression. To Vālmīki goes the credit of reviving Vedic metres in a better and more regulated form, than giving a fresh impetus to the writing of poetry. He was perhaps the first *ṛṣi* who adopted the Vedic *chandas* to the composition of poems in classical Sanskrit. The Vedic *anuṣṭubh* consisted of four *pādas* or lines, each line consisting of eight syllables, whereas the *anuṣṭubh* of classical Sanskrit as introduced by Vālmīki contains two restrictions : *viz.*, that the fifth syllable of the first and third lines should be long, while the seventh syllable of the second and fourth lines should be short—thereby introducing a sort of rhythm more defined than that of the Vedic metres. In thus adopting the Vedic *anuṣṭubh* to modern Sanskrit, Vālmīki may justly be hailed as the father of classical Sanskrit poetry.

The adoption of poetry for literary expression was facilitated by another consideration. As has been seen, writing was not common. So, literature in these days must have passed on orally. Even the oral method entailed much labour and difficulty on the part of the teacher and the taught. Experience must have shown that poetry with its fixed length, its equal number of syllables and its rhymes was easier to memorize than prose which is more fluid and subject to interpolation. Vālmīki boldly faced this reality and, with the consummate skill of an artist, gave it a form. He adopted poetic (*i.e.*, metrical) style for his composition and, thus, must have made a startling, and yet highly favoured, innovation in the domain of literary expression (I. 4). His epic story itself would have appealed to the listeners, but by using the metrical form of narration, of pithy, intelligible verses known as *ślokas*, that appeal was made stronger and more enduring. Poetic style, thus, came to stay as the vehicle of popular literature.

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[1] Lakṣmaṇa could not follow Dadhimukha's complaint about the destruction of Madhuvana (V. 63 14).

The aesthetic conception of *rasa* (I. 4. 9), or poetic bliss, had come to be recognized during Vālmīki's time. Ānandavardhana, the celebrated writer on poetics, refers to the second canto of the Bālakāṇḍa in support of his contention that the notion of *rasa* first came to be applied to literature through Vālmīki. The story is related (I. 2) that Vālmīki was one day rambling out in the woods on the banks of the Tamasā when he saw a pair of *krauñca* birds joyfully twittering on the branch of a tree. An arrow came that very moment, unseen from a hunter in ambush and struck the male which instantly fell whirling on the ground bespattered in blood. The moving sight of the dying crane and the piteous wails of his mate engendered pity (*kāruṇya*) in the heart of the sage who, in a flush of emotion, spontaneously burst out in an ecstatic verse (I. 2. 15) of exquisite melody and pathos, and became lost in pure bliss. Thus was the first *śloka* invented. The poet tried later introspectively to analyse the whole state of his mind from the moment when the original feeling arose to the time when he attained ecstasy, and his laments conclude that "that which proceeded from me who was overpowered by pathos shall be nothing but poetry or rhythmic expression"—*rasa*.[1]

According to Ānandavardhana, the various steps in the process which led to the utterance of rhythmic expression by Vālmīki are : (1) The perceptual experience of the event ; (2) the transference of the perceptual experience to the imagination as the cause of that feeling of pathos, which translated itself into (3) a spontaneous outburst of poetry, and, ultimately, led to (4) the attainment of pure joy. Ānandavardhana regard, this last blissful state as the feeling which poetry or any sort of rhythmic expression, should evoke in the mind of the critic. The science of poesy, which started when Vālmīki analysed the nature of his spontaneous outpouring in rhythms, later came to be known as *alaṅkāraśāstra* or *sāhityaśāstra*.

The above story of Vālmīki's giving vent to a metrical utterance at the sight of the *krauñca* tragedy is also plausible in the light of the modern theory that metrical compositions must originally have been prompted by highly emotional feelings.[2] Hazlitt defines poetry as "the natural impression of any object or event by its vividness, exciting an involuntary movement of imagination or passion and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice or sounds expressing it."[3]

The first metrical utterance of the primeval poet was greeted by gods and sages and, it is stated, Brahmā himself came from heaven to congratulate him on the unique position attained by him and urged upon him to compose the story of Rāma in the *śloka* metre (I. 2. 31-6). Posterity hailed Vālmīki as the *ādi-kavi*,[4] and the epic came to be acclaimed during his own day as the *ādi-kāvya* (VI. 128. 105), or the first specimen of artistic poetry, in Sanskrit literature.

Vālmīki does not allude to any other poetic composition of his day. He calls his poem a *kāvya* (I. 4. 7) as well as *gīta* (I. 4. 17). It is said that he taught Kuśa and Lava to sing the ballad to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument (VII. 93. 15). This fact, coupled with another that the Rāmāyaṇa "records the great actions of an individual hero and is told in rapid impassioned verse," leads one to the inevitable conclusion that the poem is an admixture of heroic and lyric.

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[1] I. 2. 18 ; Mulk Raj Anand : *Hindu View of Art*, pp. 146 ff.; cf. *Raghuvaṁśa* IV. 70 ; *Dhvanyāloka* I. 5.

[2] Cf. the adage : "Poesy is the child of pity."

[3] Quoted by C. V. Vaidya in *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*.

[4] *Raghuvaṁśa* XV. 41 ; *Bhāgavata* I. 1. 1.

A close study of Vālmīki's delightful Poem reveals that poetic art had reached a high degree of perfection during his period, and especially at his hands. The Rāmāyaṇa well answers the fourfold test of an epic poem from the aspects of the story, the characters, the sentiment and the language.[1] If one analyses the *alaṅkāras* (figures of speech) of the Rāmāyaṇa, one is likely to come across—in a most effortless presentation—practically all the *alaṅkāras* which have been defined and analysed in later rhetorical works.[2] The contents of Vālmīki's imagery persist to a very great extent in later works which, therefore, can be better understood only with reference to the Rāmāyaṇa.[3]

Vālmīki laid the foundation of the great art of depicting Nature in her various moods, though his own preferred emphasis usually is on the realistic aspect of a scene. The aspect of its utility to man is thin and shadowy. Rāma, during his separation from Sītā, says: "I am without my wife, and my throne, and am broken into pieces like the banks of a river. As the rains make all places extremely impassable, so my sorrow is broad and wide, and it seems to me as if I shall never be able to ford over to my great enemy, Rāvaṇa', (IV. 28. 58-9). Further, he sees the lightning by the side of the dark cloud which suggests to him that Sītā might similarly be lying in the lap of Rāvaṇa (IV. 28. 12). Witnessing the new showers of rain, he thinks of the tears that may be streaming down her eyes (IV. 28. 7). Nature, thus, is reminiscent of human situations and events, but there is no pragmatic perspective regarding the rains. Human comparisons, however, are quite common. Thus, in describing the hills, he speaks of them as if they were wearing garments of black deer-skin, and he compares the rains with the holy thread and the music of the rains with the chanting of Vedic hymns (IV. 28. 10). Yet, apart from such human analogies, the general tendency of Vālmīki's descriptions is to be realistic—description of fruits and flowers, of birds and beasts, of muddy roads and moist winds and so on. Later, Bhavabhūti seems to have followed this trait of realism, in poetry, in his description of nature.[4]

In the depicting of highest ideals of a sublime life, in the expressing of lofty and noble sentiments, in the development of pathos and of minute and effective characterization, Vālmīki gives a splendid account of his art. To quote Monier Williams: "There are in the whole range of the world's literature few more charming poems than the Rāmāyaṇa. The classical purity, the clearness and simplicity of its style, the exquisite touches of true poetic feeling with which it abounds, its graphic description of heroic incidents and nature's grandest scenes, the deep acquaintance it displays with the conflicting workings of the human heart—all entitle it to rank among the most beautiful compositions that have appeared in any country."[5]

The period of the Rāmāyaṇa abounded in numerous tales of bygone heroes and heroines. Vālmīki calls his poem an *ākhyāna* (I. 4. 26) or narrative. With the central Rāma-story of the epic, he has connected many another legend told by sages and hermits by way of illustration, or enlightenment, for his listeners. In the

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1. C. V. Vaidya : *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 53-62.
2. K. A. S. Iyer : *Studies in the Imagery of the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Journal of Oriental Research*, vol. v, part 3, p. 148).
3. *Op. cit.*, p. 155.
4. S. N. Dasgupta and S. K. De : *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. cxxviii.
5. *Indian Wisdom*, p. 363.

Bālakāṇḍa, Viśvāmitra regales and encourages the princes, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, by relating stories about their ancestors and the exploits of Bhagīratha who traced the entire course of the Gaṅgā. It was during these impressionistic years that the young princes were probably fired with enthusiasm to emulate their great forefathers in their own future exploits. The largest addition of such tales, however, are to be found in the Uttarakāṇḍa.

In the genuine Rāmāyaṇa, too, Vālmīki often compares his characters to the heroes of old. Mythological similes are interspersed throughout the epic and the reader is led to believe that the poet, while composing his poem, had access to some large fund of legends which he freely drew upon to lend added weight to his own characters. For example, Vālī, fallen in battle, struck by Rāma's arrow, is depicted like Yayāti banished from heaven by Indra (IV. 17. 9). Bharata, bemoaning with his ministers his father's loss, is compared to Yayāti again in company of the holy sages of the forest after his fall from heaven (II. 77. 10). Hanumān, assuming a gigantic form for a leap across the ocean, is compared to Viṣṇu (in disguise) taking up his *viśvarūpa* (cosmic form) in order to measure the three "steps" granted to him by Bali (IV. 67. 3-4). In the Araṇyakāṇḍa, Sītā, in reply to Rāvaṇa's attempt to win her over, says that if only Rāma had seen him while she was being removed by force, he (Rāma) would have burnt him instantly just as god Rudra had burnt Manmatha (III. 56. 10).

Narration of traditional tales was a popular pastime (II. 67. 16). Kaikeyī, Tārā, Rāma, Sumantra and the forest-dwelling sages are time and again found to allude to, or narrate at length, lives of the heroes of the past to expound their own standpoints. Sources of these tales were collectively termed *purāṇa* (VI. 113. 41). As none of the extant Purāṇas is named by the poet, it seems that the term stood for the entire body of traditional, mythological or legendary tales which had acquired currency in Vālmīki's time. References to persons well versed in *purāṇa* are numerous in the epic, and sometimes even full tales are narrated from the *purāṇa*. Jaṭāyu is described as conversant with *purāṇa* (III. 50. 3), and Sumantra was well-grounded in the puranic lore (II. 15. 18). At IV. 62. 3, the Rāmāyaṇa gives a hint that the term *purāṇa* meant a prophecy made in olden times.

Vālmīki calls his poem *purātana itihāsa* (VI. 117. 32) or ancient history. From the point of view of political history, it has a unique importance of its own. The age of Vālmīki marks an important epoch in the early history of the Aryan race, and his epic is the first record of the penetration of the Aryans to the south of the Vindhyas. It furnishes an historical account of a number of aboriginal tribes which had been well established in the south of India and of a series of attempts on the part of the northern Indian kings to conquer them and introduce their own civilization among them.[1] It embodies an account of the actual working of the political institutions of the Aryans of that period, their conception of kingship, system of government, assemblies, ministries and central, local and revenue administration, and military organization.[2] It is, of course, true that, like the ancient works of all countries, its historical information sometimes gets mixed up with myths and fiction. Being essentially a *kāvya*, poetical embellishment often gets the better of historical sense. The material furnished by the epic has, therefore, to be used with caution. The numerous stories, legends and myths, which often mar the historical narrative, have to be patiently dissected by the critic in order to separate fact from fiction and history from legend.

The Rāmāyaṇa is not a history in the sense that it is only an account of events and dynasties within rigid limits of chronology. The epic gives two lists[1] of the solar kings of Ayodhyā down to the time of Rāma. The thirteen Purāṇas also give the whole genealogy of the kings of Ayodhyā. The *Mahābhārata* mentions the early part as far as Dṛḍhāśva and other small portions elsewhere. The *Raghuvaṁśa* has much of the latter half from Dilīpa II to Agnivarṇa. All these authorities are on the whole in general agreement so far as they go, except the Rāmāyaṇa. Its two lists are practically the same but differ widely from the others listed here. Pargiter has thoroughly scanned the two Vālmīki lists and, comparing them with the rest, has come to the conclusion that the Rāmāyaṇa genealogy must be put aside as erroneous and the puranic genealogy accepted. When examined, as a whole or in detail, the Rāmāyaṇa genealogy is open to great doubt. There are many omissions in its list of kings. It contains only 35 kings down to Rāma, whereas the Purāṇas name 63 in that period. There are, besides, numerous discrepancies in the relationships and positions of several kings. The fact that the later *Raghuvaṁśa* rejects the earlier Rāmāyaṇa genealogy, and accepts the puranic one, proves the unauthenticity of the Rāmāyaṇa for a reconstruction of the dynastic history of ancient India.[2]

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[1] V. R. R. Dikshitar : *South India in the Rāmāyaṇa* (Pro. of VIII Or. Conf., 1933).

[2] See P. C. Dharmā : *The Rāmāyaṇa Polity*.

Ancient Aryans, however, never conceived history in the sense we moderns understand it. They looked upon it as a handmaid of their culture and aimed, in their works, at the dissemination of a knowledge of their social and political institutions, constantly evolving, rather than at the writing of a chronicle or compilation of a bare record of datable events. What Vālmīki was perhaps more concerned with was "the effect and influence of human events and acts on human conduct." Like the ancient Greeks he was highly imaginative and artistic, and he gave a free rein to his power as a visionary in dealing with contemporary events, intent as he was on drawing some moral lessons from them for future generations.[3]

In the Rāmāyaṇa is not a "defined system of speculative" philosophy either. A deep religious sense of duty, right and justice pervades the epic, having an intensely moral tone about it. The goodly number of technical terms, no doubt, indicate a strong undercurrent of philosophical speculation ; nevertheless, "the Rāmāyaṇa presents a practical philosophy, underlining ethics and religion, in the shape of a poem of engrossing interest. The higher philosophical truths are touched only incidentally in presenting a verisimilitude of the cultural atmosphere."[4] A sober commonsense, free from dogmatism prevails throughout the composition. Sectarianism is not in evidence, although pious devotion to various deities is frequently alluded to. Scriptural testimony, as pronounced by the sages, was, as a rule, highly esteemed and preferred to the depositions of perception and inference in subtler matters ; still, nothing was too sacred to be immune from the searching logical criticism (*ānvīkṣikī*) of *lokāyatikas* or materialists (who are fairly in evidence).[5] They are condemned as *nāstikas* (nihilists) whose views appear summed up in the speech of Jābāli (to Rāma), the one solitary instance of philosophical theorizing in the epic. Persuading Rāma to return to his father's capital with the stock arguments of the well-known Cārvāka (atheistic) philosophy, Jābāli says : "Who is your father and what do you owe to him ? These relations are mere accidents. Why do you not enjoy the kingdom offered to you by Bharata of his own accord ? Why do you think of things which are merely inferential and reject what is certain and visible ? *Śrāddhas* and sacrifices have been invented merely to induce people to make gifts. If oblations given in a

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1. I. 70. 21-44; II. 110. 6-35
2. F. E. Pargiter : *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, pp. 90-3.
3. Jawaharlal Nehru : *The Discovery of India*, p. 103.
4. See S Radhakrishnan : *History of Philosophy Eastern and Western*, p. 82. (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London).
5. *Ibid.*

śrāddha can reach the deceased, or his soul in another body, why cannot oblations and offerings made to an absent friend reach him and satisfy his hunger?" (II. 108). Vehemently criticizing and reproaching Jābāli, Rāma denounces the views of speculative philosophy which are far remote from the common sentiments of mankind and discredit, by sophistry and false logic, all established social and religious institutions based on commonsense. The observations of Rāma in reply (II. 109) are full of eternal and universal truths and of abiding ethical interest. His praise of truthfulness is, indeed, sublime; he tells Jābāli that truth is dearer to him than anything else, especially because subjects take to the ways adopted by their kings.

CHAPTER XIV

SCIENCE

Like literature, science too had an important place in the scheme of things of the epic period. That the science of astronomy was no mystery at that time is amply evident from the copious references to astronomical data. The conception of days and nights, of months and years (and of cycles) had been formed long before the epic period, and these are regularly mentioned by Vālmīki in the normal course of his narration. The three basic facts of the calendar—the day, the date and the *nakṣatra* (star)—were recognized. Among week days, the Rāmāyaṇa alludes only to Thursday. Rāma's coronation was proposed on this day when the constellation of Puṣya was in conjunction with the Moon, with Bṛhaspati presiding over the conjunction (II. 26. 9). Rāma is said to have met sage Bharadvāja on the *pañcamī tithi* (fifth day of the fortnight (VI. 124. 1). The full moon day (*paurṇamāsī*, V. 19. 13) and the autumnal (*śāradī) paurṇamāsī* are referred to (VI. 24. 1). The fourteenth and fifteenth days of the dark fortnight of the month are mentioned by Supārśva in his address to Rāvaṇa (VI. 92. 62). Rāma's birth took place on the ninth lunar day of Caitra under the influence of the Punarvasu asterism when the Sun, the Moon, and Saturn, Jupiter and Venus were at Arius, Capricorn, Libra, Cancer and Pisces respectively, and when Jupiter had risen with the Moon at Cancer (I. 18. 8-10). Bharata was born under Puṣya when the Sun had entered Pisces, while the two sons of Sumitrā were born when the Sun arose in Cancer under Aśleṣa (the ninth lunar mansion, I. 18. 15).

Among constellations, the charm of Mṛgaśirā is referred to by Rāma on observing the golden deer in the forest (III. 43. 37). Astrological similes are often employed by Vālmīki. The contest between Vālī and Sugrīva was like unto the planets—Mercury (Budha) and Mars (Aṅgāraka)—clashing with each other (IV. 12. 17). Rāvaṇa, beholding the young and pious Sītā, was like the terrible Rāhu eyeing Rohiṇī forsaken by the Moon (III. 46. 6). The conjunction of Rohiṇī with the Moon is a favourite comparison of Vālmīki, and it is used by him as a symbol of steadfast conjugal union.[1] The invasion of one star (*nakṣatra*) by another planet (*graha*), of one planet by another planet, of the Sun and the Moon by the planets, and the consequent agitation of the oceans were phenomena well known even in those days.[2] Those in the clutches of death were said to have their stars afflicted by the planets (VI. 4. 52). Rāvaṇa darting upon Sītā is likened to an enraged planet rushing upon Rohiṇī (VI. 92. 42).

The phenomenon of solar and lunar eclipses is frequently referred to[3] The southern solstice (*dakṣiṇāyana*) is alluded to at III. 16. 8. Several stars, planets and constellations are mentioned. Viśākhā was the racial star of the Ikṣvāku race (VI. 4. 50). The Puṣya dominated the heavens in the *hemanta* season (III. 16. 12). Bhaga (I. 72. 13) and Prajāpati (VI. 102. 32) were the deities of Phālgunī and Rohiṇī respectively. Nairṛti was the deity of the star Nairṛta (VI. 4. 51).

The following astronomical phenomena were looked upon as inauspicious and ominous :

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1. I. 1. 28 ; II. 118. 11; 16. 42 ; VI. 92. 57
2. V. 19. 9 ; 15. 22 ; IV. 12. 17 ; III. 23. 34 ; VI. 102. 32-3
3. II. 18. 6 ; 63. 2 ; 12. 63 ; 40. 30 ; 42. 12 ; VI. 102. 32

The solar and lunar eclipses ; assailment of Rohiṇī by Budha, or by Rāhu and Aṅgāraka, or that of Citrā by Śani : stars not coursing as usual or shorn of their brightness ; planets deprived of their sheen ; (enraged at each other) planetary bodies becoming shorn of their brightness ; the star Nairṛta in trouble, being sore afflicted and touched by the rod-bearing Dhūmraketu ; the Moon in conjunction with Hasta (Hasta, incidently, sprung from Punarvasu, was the star of doom portending death to Rāvaṇa); Triśaṅku, Lohitāṅga, Bṛhaspati, Budha and other *grahas* getting at the Moon and remaining with fierce aspects ; Viśākha appearing in blaze ; the cardinal points appearing distressed and enveloped in darkness with no planet or star visible ; the Sun seized by Svarbhānu without any *parva*.[1]

On the other hand, the following astronomical phenomena were regarded as auspicious :

Śukra wearing an auspicious aspect ; Viśākha appearing stainless and free from disturbances ; Dhruva appearing without blemish ; Seven Sages, pure and furnished with lustre, going round Dhruva ; the Moon in conjunction with the Puṣya (constellation) ; Uttarāphālgunī in the ascendant. (This was Sītā's natal star. Rāma's expedition against Rāvaṇa, which began under the influence of this star, augured deliverance to Vaidehī).[2]

Astrology was also widely cultivated. The people of the age firmly believed in it, and astrologers were in great demand for prognosticating future events. They were known as *lākṣaṇika* (VI. 48. 2), *lakṣaṇin* (II 29. 9), *kārtāntika* (VI. 48. 5), *gaṇaka* (I. 13. 7) or *daivajña* (II. 4. 18 ; VI. 32. 12.) Astrological knowledge was largely the heritage of Brāhmaṇas, some of whom were engaged by royal courts. King Daśaratha was told by his astrologers that his natal star had been influenced by malevolent planets like the Sun, Mars and Rāhu (presaging approaching death) and, so, the king hastened the installation of Rāma on the throne as speedily as possible (II. 4. 18-20). Sītā's sojourn in the forest had been foretold by astrologers while she was yet in her father's house (II. 29. 8-9); while lamenting over Rāma's supposed death, she stated that all the predictions of astrologers about herself and Rāma had proved false (VI. 48. 2 ; 32. 12). Rāma is said to have had all auspicious marks of royalty (*rāja-lakṣaṇa-saṁyukta*, IV. 4. 10). Sītā was endowed with all auspicious marks of "non-widowhood, motherhood and queenhood" (VI. 48. 2-14). Widespread belief in auspicious moments for undertaking new ventures presupposes a correct and minute knowledge of *muhūrtas* and kindred astrological matters.

Vālmīki gives fairly profuse references to the practice of medicine in his age. He makes clear mention of *Āyurveda*, the Indian science of medicine (I. 45. 31). The medical profession was in a flourishing state. The city of Ayodhyā was inhabited by a goodly number of *vaidyas* or physicians (II. 100. 42). *Vaidyas* were generally treated with respect by kings (II. 100 13). Rāma advised Bharata to win over the *vaidyas* with gifts, affectionate regard and agreeable speech (II. 100. 13, 60). Skilled physicians were maintained in the service of kings. While supplicating before Kaikeyī, Daśaratha beseeched her to speak out her malady, so that his expert physicians might attend to her ailment (II. 10. 30-1).

Disease (*vyādhi*) was looked upon as a visitation from providence (II. 100. 69). There is an allusion to Wind, Bile and Phlegm in the Uttarakāṇḍa (5. 7). This *kāṇḍa* also describes the acute suffering caused to the people from a widespread incidence of dropsy (VII. 35. 50-65). It is said that, owing to the anger of the wind-god, the excretal functioning of all creatures was obstructed, their breath impeded, their bellies swollen and their joints, as if being pierced, became hard as wood. Entire population was put to excruciating affliction and untold distress and, it is mentioned, only devout congregational prayers to the wind-god alleviated the misery of the people.

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[1] II. 18. 6 ; 12. 63 ; III. 49. 16 ; 46. 6 ; VI. 24. 7 ; 41. 19 ; II. 41. 10-1, 13 ; VI. 57. 36 ; 4. 5 ; III. 23 12

[2] VI. 4. 48, 50 ; II. 26. 9 ; VI. 4. 5

Incessant lamentations were believed to result in blindness. Rāma in the forest was overtaken by the fear lest by lamenting ceaselessly his parents should become blind (II. 46. 6).

The idea of a disease was conveyed by the term *āmaya* (VII. 5. 7), *roga* (VI. 22. 38) or *vyādhi* (II. 10. 31). *Ātura* (VI. 5. 13) meant a sick man. *Cittamoha* (V. 34. 23) was mental derangement. *Garbha-parisrava-skanna* (I. 37. 26-7) meant abortion and miscarriage. Fracture of the jaw was conveyed by the expression *hanuḥ abhajyata* (VII. 35. 47). *Kubja* (I. 32. 25) was one deformed with a hump on his back. *Mahodara* (VII. 35. 54) was dropsy, *mṛgatṛṣṇikā* (V. 34. 23) delusion, *unmāda* (V. 34. 24) insanity, *vātagati* (V. 34. 23) gout, *vraṇa* (II. 73. 3) sore, *vyādhita* (I. 14. 13) (chronic) invalid and *vidhāna* (VI. 10. 18) medical prescription. Obstruction in the free flow of urine was *viṇ-mūtrāśaya-āvaraṇa* (VII. 35. 50). *Netrātura* (VI. 115. 17) was one suffering from an eye-disease in which there is intolerance of light.

Medical treatment meant recourse to herbs and plants. Magic and sorcery were also "traditionally" employed with a view to enhancing the efficacy of herbal treatment. Suṣeṇa, the Vānara physician, referred to a battle of yore wherein Bṛhaspati is said to have treated the wounded Devas with medicinal herbs accompanied by spells (VI. 50. 28)

Fragrant water was used to restore a senseless man to consciousness. When Rāma swooned on being apprised of the slaughter of (*māyā*) Sītā by Indrajit, the Vānara chiefs sprinkled on him water scented with lotuses (VI. 83. 12). For the love-lorn sandal-paste served as a cooling unguent (IV. 1. 60). The effects of drink were removed by copious urination (V. 64. 4).

Proficient and skilled surgeons, known as *śalyakṛt* (V. 28. 6), existed at the time of the Rāmāyaṇa. Performance of obstetric operations was certainly known. In cases of difficult labour, surgeons resorted to the cutting of the foetus in the womb with sharp instruments (V. 28. 6). There is an interesting reference even to transplantation of an eye-ball (II. 14. 5). When Indra had his scrotum severed through the curse of Gautama and was thus deprived of the power of regeneration (I. 48. 27-8), the assembled *pitṛdevas* transplanted the scrotum of a ram to the person of the sufferer (I. 49. 8). This incident postulates a knowledge of intricate surgical operations.

The science of midwifery seems to have been considerably developed as it is stated that, during Rāma's reign, women gave birth to babies without any risk (*arogaprasavā nāryaḥ*, VII. 41. 19). A nurse was called a *dhātrī* (I. 38. 18). Prematurely born babies were reared by nurses by keeping them in jars of ghee. The nurses in Sagara's palace knew the art of incubating a prematurely born foetus. Of the two queens of Sagara, the younger, Sumati, is said to have given birth to a gourd-like foetus, and, when it opened, innumerable tiny half-breathing lives are said to have issued out of it. The nurses fostered them in jars filled with *ghee* till they attained maturity (I. 38. 18). *Ghee* being a good non-conductor of both heat and cold, the infant was reared at a uniform temperature.

Diseases of animals were known and attended to. There are references to indisposed elephants suffering from fever (II. 58. 3). Vibhīṣaṇa, when pointing out to Rāvaṇa the bad omens in Laṅkā, told him that his ailing asses, mules and camels were not returning to normal although treated medicinally (VI. 10. 18). The existence of veterinary medicine and veterinary doctors can, therefore, be presumed.

Corpses were preserved by some form of embalming. Daśaratha's body was kept in a capacious pan with oil to prevent decay and disintegration till the arrival of Bharata (II. 66. 14). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, Rāma asks Lakṣmaṇa to preserve the dead child of the Brāhmaṇa petitioner in a jar of oil with spices and aromatic drugs, so that it might not be soiled or disfigured by any means, its joints may not be loosened and its hair may not fall off (VII. 75. 2-4). Similarly, King Nimi's body was preserved by the Brāhmaṇas, pending the completion of his sacrifice, by means of fragrant substances, garlands and cloth (VII. 57. 11). Hence, as among ancient Egyptians, among ancient Indians too, knowledge of corpse preservation must have been largely prevalent.

Great stress was laid on the necessity of *pathya* or discreet diet, both as a precaution against ill health and as a prescription in disease ; for, wholesome food, if needlessly taken, is productive of disease (II. 64. 59 ; 12. 71). It was considered advisable always to take such food as would not cause illness (III. 50. 18). A man desirous of meeting his end is averse to taking medicine and does not observe *pathya* (III. 40. 2 ; 53. 17 ; VI. 17. 15).

Since the Rāmāyaṇa age was characterized by a lot of fighting, the art of treating men wounded on the battle-field was particularly well developed, and military surgeons were in especial demand. Physicians accompanied royal armies on the march. They were, for instance, included among the camp-followers of Bharata's army (II. 83. 12-4). Suṣeṇa, father-in-law of Sugrīva (VI. 50. 23), was a highly skilled surgeon whose expert services stood the Vānaras in excellent stead in the battle of Laṅkā. He kept up the fighting capacity of the army at its highest by administering to the warriors invigorating herbs and juices when they were wounded or tired by long fighting (VI. 91. 21-8). On more than one occasion, restoration to life of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and to other chiefs on the Vānara side, was solely attributable to the prompt and efficacious medical attentions of Suṣeṇa. He knew all about drugs and their habitats and could cure even "surgical cases" with medicinal herbs. When Indrajit had wounded most of the Vānara chiefs along with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān was sent to fetch four medicinal herbs—*mṛtasañjīvanī*, *viśalyakaraṇī*, *suvarṇakaraṇī* and *sandhānī* from the Oṣadhi Hills in the Himālayas (VI. 74. 29-34). *Mṛtasañjīvanī* was a drug for resuscitating the dead ; *viśalyakaraṇī* was intended to remove pain and arrows ; *suvarṇakaraṇī* was capable of restoring to the wounded limbs their wonted hue, while *sandhānī* was meant for curing fractures and cut surfaces.

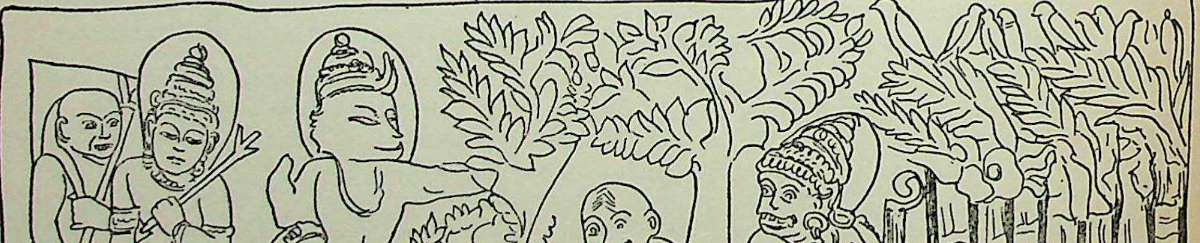

Fig. 53. **Rāma exhibiting his powess by shooting an arrow through the stems of seven palm trees ; Prambanan, Javs, ninth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).**

Suṣeṇa employed "inhalation treatment" for providing instantaneous relief by using very powerful drugs for insufflation into the nose. When Lakṣmaṇa was sorely wounded by a *śakti* of Rāvaṇa, Hanumān brought the aforementioned four medicinal plants from the Mahodaya mountain and Suṣeṇa, after pounding them, administered them to Lakṣmaṇa through his nostrils which had immediate effect (VI. 101. 43-4).

Great care was taken of the wounded in Rāma's army. Wounded soldiers were most probably treated even in the battle-field, as there is no indication of their being sent to the rear in the camping ground. Evidence can be adduced to prove some sort of first-aid being attempted on the battle field. When the Vānara army was sorely hit by the *brahmāstra* of Indrajit in the night-battle, Hanumān and Vibhīṣaṇa went round the field with torches in their hands to cheer up the wounded soldiers and administer them first-aid (VI. 74. 6-7). Sugrīva directed Suṣeṇa to take wounded Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Kiṣkindhā (VI. 50. 24). When Indrajit was slain by Lakṣmaṇa and a respite was gained by the Vānara army, Rāma ordered Suṣeṇa to heal the wounds of the Vānara heroes to enable them to recoup their vitality for the next round of the battle (VI. 91. 22-6).

There were certain antiseptic herbs whose application served as a protection from the corroding effects of dreadful weapons. The Rākṣasa warriors, Triśirā and others, are described as proceeding to the front after smearing their bodies with medicinal herbs and aromatics as a prevention against festering wounds (VI. 69. 18).

Oṣadhis or herbs had to be searched for in huge forests (III. 67. 15) and on hills. The Himālayas were and still are reputed to be an abode of medicinal herbs of all descriptions (VI. 74. 29 32). Some herbs were said to illumine the regions all around (VI. 74. 32). On the Citrakūṭa Hill, herbs, growing by the thousand, all shone at night and became visible by their own lustre like flames of fire (II. 94. 21). Herbs antidotal to snake poison grew on the Mahendra mountain (V. 1. 21). The habitat of these herbs was a matter of common knowledge to forest-dwellers like the Vānaras (VI. 50. 30). Indeed, ancient Indians possessed a wide knowledge of practical botany, and their vegetable drugs were numerous and highly efficacious.

Full knowledge was possessed by surgeons of the structure of the human body, as can be inferred from the many anatomical terms used in the epic. Whether or not life was extinct in the patient was precisely determined by a correct reading of the contours and facial expressions of the body. Something of the nature of a medical diagnosis can be traced in Suṣeṇa's statement about Lakṣmaṇa whom Rāma took for dead from the effect of Rāvaṇa's *śakti*. Cheering up Rāma, he said : "Lakṣmaṇa is not dead. His face is not distorted or darkened. Just look at his countenance which is beautifully bright and cheerful. His palms resemble lotus-petals and his eyes are pleasant. Such are not the characteristics of lifeless bodies. This one is instinct with life. As he is lying stretched on the ground, his heart, trembling every moment, testifies to his respiration" (VI. 101. 24-8).

The anatomical conditions, obtaining in the human body on the eve of death, were well understood. The queens of Daśaratha knew the practical distinction between deep sleep and death. When they felt the king, as he lay in bed apparently asleep, did not perceive any action in the ever-moving pulse, they became apprehensive of his end (II. 65. 13-4). Trijaṭā assured Sītā that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were not dead, for although lying insensible with arrows, their grace had not left them, whereas the faces of persons dead and gone become unsightly to a degree (VI. 48. 31-2). Physiognomy also was a fully developed science in the epic age.

The *summum bonum* of medical science from time immemorial has been to free man from the pain of disease and death, and in every age ingenious experiments

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have been performed with some amount of success. The Rāmāyaṇa, as well, records attempts of man hankering after elusive immortality. "How can we become exempt from decrepitude and disease and attain immortality ?" (I. 45. 16-7)—had been the motive force behind the churning of the Ocean, by the gods and demons, in search of ambrosia. Various supposedly death-dispelling drugs like the *mṛtasañjīvanī* (VI. 74. 33) and elixirs of life (*rasāyanam*, VI. 5. 13) "were" discovered or invented. The Rākṣasas, fired with imperialistic ambitions, dreaded mortality as a most sinister foe and undertook prolonged austerities for obtaining perpetual life as a gift from "gods" (VII. 10. 16). But, all thoughtful souls aknowledge that death is the common lot of all beings (II. 72. 15) and that the inexorable law of time (*kāladharma*, II. 72. 37) is relentless.

There are numerous references to animals and their living habits in the Rāmāyaṇa. Animals, on the whole, belonged to two classes : (1) *nagarajam*, those inhabiting the city, and (2) *rāṣṭrajam*, those inhabiting the country-side (I. 10. 9). The proneness of animals to adapt themselves to their environs was well known. Sampāti enunciated a theory analogous to the modern theory of acclimatization of animals to their environment and adjustment of habits and needs to local conditions. He told the Vānaras, who wondered at his sharp eye-sight, that "the sharpness of the vision of birds depended on the distance at which they could espy their natural food. Land birds, like cocks, find their food on the ground ; they need not see far when searching for food. Hence their vision is not very sharp. The crows feeding on the fruits of trees have to see farther when flying and have better vision. The hawks have a sharp sight, while the vision of vultures is still sharper as they have got to spot their food when flying high in the sky. The Garuḍa flies highest ; it has to locate its food from a great height and, hence, its sight is very sharp" (IV. 58, 24-7).

Elephants and horses, being closely associated with human activities in every walk of life, were closely observed. The epic records many bits of interesting information about them. There were six varieties of elephants in use—*bhadra* (with contracted limbs), *mandra* (with fat, slack and contracted body), *mṛga* (with lean and large bodies), and *bhadramandra*, *bhadramṛga* and *mṛgamandra* (cross-breeds of the first three varieties, I. 6. 25). Elephants were gregarious creatures, always moving about in herds (II. 103. 41), led by their "leader" (V. 19. 18). There are frequent allusions to 'distressed she-elephants separated from their bands (V. 17. 22). Helpless women are often compared to female elephants separated from their herd-leader (V. 19. 18). The science of training elephants was known as *gaja-śikṣā* (V. 6. 32). The elephants of Rāvaṇa's palace are described as "first-rate creatures, possessed of eminent grace, capable of crushing hostile elephants and well trained in arts relative to their species" (V. 6. 32). It was believed that elephants and monkeys bore natural antipathy for each other (VI. 27. 25). There are references to elephants being brought down by the force of incantations, of their being stranded in mire and scared by torches (VII. 23. 45 ; VI. 13. 19). The art of taming and catching elephants was widely practised.

Several kinds and breeds of horses are referred to by Vālmīki. Rāma displayed almost a filial love towards the horses of his father (II. 50. 47). Mātali, Indra's charioteer, Indrajit and Rāvaṇa's charioteer were masters in driving horses. Among the varieties of deer mentioned are *sṛmara* (with black bushy tails), *camara* (with white bushy tails), *pṛṣata* (spotted all over), *kadalī* (with soft, erect and variegated "manor"), *priyakī* (with soft, smooth and dense hair) and *gokarṇa* (large-eared, like cow) (III. 43. 11-2, 36 ; II. 103. 42). Beautiful deer of different varieties were hunted by Rāma ranging at large in the vicinity of his hermitage at Pañcavaṭī (III. 43. 11). Vālmīki shows shrewd knowledge of wild animal life when he says "when Mārīca sported with Rāma in the form of a stag, the deer went near him and, smelling him, fled in fear away."

The *aśvatarī* was a cross-breed out of the union of an ass and a mare. It was believed that its offspring could not be freed from its mother without a caesarean operation. In this operation the mother itself is killed. Hence the saying that an *aśvatarī* is killed by its own womb (III. 43. 41). It was believed that a lion could not bear the rubbing of its tail by another, and that tigers scorned to partake of a prey killed by others (II. 61, 16, 19). Jackals (*gomāyu*, III. 57. 2), she-jackals (*śivā*, VI. 41. 20), vultures (*gṛdhra*, VI. 57. 37), cats (*biḍāla*, (VII. 6. 58), snake (*sarisṛpa*, VI. 10. 16) and doves (*kapota*, VI. 35. 31) were animals and birds of ill omen. Vālmīki refers to sharks or whales (*mahājhaṣa*) piercing through the ocean (VI. 59. 35). He also speaks of three-hooded and five-hooded serpents (I. 22. 7 ; V. 1. 54). There are frequent allusions to she-serpents casting off their slough (VI. 33. 32). Serpents were supposed to be restrained and confined by charms, herbs and incantations (III. 29. 28; II. 12. 5). The species of reptiles frequenting the hilly regions was commonly called *sarīsṛpas* (II. 25. 18).

Knowledge of geometry can also be proved to have existed in the age. One of the chief parts of *Vedāṅga* is *kalpa* (ritual or ceremonial). The *Kalpasūtra*, mentioned at I. 14. 40, contains, besides other matters of ritual, rules for a proper construction of sacrificial sites. It was perhaps in this connection that the science of geometry began in ancient India. Geometry was then, indeed, the science of altar-construction. As sacrifices loomed large in the religious life of the people, geometrical knowledge was invariably required for a proper performance of them. The placing of the altars on a carefully measured ground was an integral part of the sacrifice, which had to be meticulously adjusted with reference to the presiding deity of the sacrifice (II. 56. 33). The need for exact planning of the lay-out, thus arising, compelled the Aryans to learn about right angles, squares, circles, etc. The highly developed arts of town-planning, house-construction and architecture also postulate a thorough acquaintance with geometry. The fact that bricks (*iṣṭakā*, I. 14. 28) were in use during the period likewise points to the development of geometry, because many relations between lengths, areas and volumes, are very simply illustrated by walls, cubes, altars and pyramids constructed from modular bricks. Recently, the works of Otto Neugebauer and D. E. Smith have acknowledged the useful contribution of Indian mathematicians to geometry.[1]

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[1] Sukumar Ranjan Dasgupta : *Origin of Geometry* (The Delhi University Magazine, vol. ii, no. 2, p. 61).

CHAPTER XV

ART AND AESTHETICS

The Rāmāyaṇa Aryans were a highly artistic and aesthetic people, well versed in the crafts and refinements that go with civilization. Their keen aesthetic sense is borne out by the ordinary incidents of their day-to-day life. They had a fine sense of beauty ; they derived pleasure from the beautiful and from beautifying themselves. The description which Vālmīki gives in the sixth canto of the Bālakāṇḍa is a good index of their taste, artistic tendencies and aesthetic subtleties. The big cities of the period were great centres where the arts were nurtured and encouraged under royal patronage. Even forest dwellers (the Vānaras) and cannibals (the Rākṣasas) were highly advanced in the domain of art and aesthetics. The entire epic, the way in which it is conceived and formulated, and the manner in which it is gradually developed to a climax, is permeated with subtle aesthetic touches. The incidents and characters the poet has created are all surcharged with his own supreme artistic sense. The sages, who listened to episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa, were *sahṛdayas* (men of taste), since their mind and tastes were refined and were sympathetic to the extent of losing themselves in (*i.e.*, identifying themselves with) the things they experienced (I. 4).

The profuse use of flowers as a means of personal embellishment, the toilet of the hair, the use of ointments and unguents and colourful garments the application of lac-dye to the feet and *tilaka* mark to the forehead, the drawing of floral patterns on the cheeks, the decoration of palaces, common houses, chariots and animals, the artistic lay-out of cities and parks and, above all, the cultivation of the fine arts (such as music, dancing, painting and sculpture)—all point to the elegant tastes of the populace.

The naive art practices of the early Vedic times seem to have definitely advanced to a higher stage in the Rāmāyaṇa age. The early Brahmanic or Vedic religion, which promoted such sciences as astronomy and geometry, was not favourable to the growth of art, for it enjoined the worship of gods not through images installed in temples but through sacred fires in simple dwellings. The speculative philosophy of the Upaniṣads gave a setback to the development of art which, because it was considered sensual and earthly, was deemed to be a positive hindrance to man's pursuit of the higher ideals of life. But "the austere intellectualism of the Upaniṣads gave place to the warm theology of devotional cults in the epics, and thus the psychic currents of man's soul supplied the mainspring of artistic creation."[1]

Art was never thought to be anything light or frivolous but a serious affair to be approached with due consideration and concentration. The practising artists were dominated by the twin concepts of *bhakti* and *yoga* and employed them as aids in the execution of their work in the same way as did the devotees. Dedication in a religious spirit to their professed ideals was the *bhakti* of the artists, and the concentration of attention on the elusive conception of the theme in hand in order to translate its various qualities into concrete forms was their *yoga*. In other words, *yoga* and *bhakti* were meant for self's identification with the object and for this vividness of its presentation thus as the final form of art.

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[1] Mulk Raj Anand : *Hindu View of Art*, p. 8.

A literary parallel for this conception of art as *yoga* is witnessed in the account of Vālmīki's method in writing the Rāmāyaṇa. In order to dive deep at a fuller knowledge of the history of Rāma, the sage "sipping water, seated himself with folded hands on *darbha* grass and set himself to the comprehension of his theme through *yoga* (contemplation). By virtue of his yogic power, he saw clearly before him Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, and Daśaratha together with his wives in his kingdom, laughing, talking, acting and moving as in real life. Concentrating himself in *yoga*, the virtuous sage saw all that happened before as clearly as one does the *āmālaka* fruit on one's palm. And, having truly seen by virtue of his concentration, the illustrious sage began the setting forth of the charming history of Rāma" (1. 3. 2-7).

Here the work of art is completed before the work of actual transcription or representation is begun. Croce rightly speaks of "the artist who never makes a stroke with his brush without having seen it with his imagination," and remarks that the externalization of a work of art "implies a vigilant will which persists in not allowing certain visions, intuitions or representations to be lost."[1]

The employment of the power of *yoga* in the service of art is not merely a mental exercise or a religious discipline but the most practical preparation for any undertaking whatsoever. Hanumān, for instance, during his search for Sītā, prayed to the gods (V. 13. 62), meditated for a moment, and mentally ranged the Aśoka grove before locating her ; only then did he spring from the walls of Laṅkā, like an arrow from a bow, and enter the grove.[2] In India, it has always been believed that all knowledge is directly accessible to the concentrated and one-pointed mind without the direct use of the physical senses. This is a matter of personal experience for all inventors, artists and mathematicians. In the language of psycho-analysis, this concentration preparatory to undertaking a specific task is "the willed introversion of a creative mind which, retreating before its own problem and inwardly collecting its forces, dips at least for a moment (V. 14. 1) into 'the source of life' in order there to wrest a little more strength from the mother for the completion of its work, and the result of the union (*yoga*) is a fountain of youth and new fertility. This is true as much of the literary artist as of the architect, the painter and the sculptor."[3]

The word *śilpa*, which in Sanskrit means art, occurs repeatedly in the Rāmāyaṇa (II. 1. 28 ; I. 14. 28). It includes fine arts such as *gīta* (vocal music), *nṛtta* (dance), *vādya* (instrumental music), *citrakarma* (painting), etc. Art was cultivated both as a profession as well as a means of diversion. The professional artist was known as *śilpakāra* (I. 13. 7). The cultivation of art for the sake of recreation is alluded to when Rāma is described as an connoisseur in the arts of entertainment (*vaihārikāṇām śilpānām vijñātā*, II. 1. 28).

The Rāmāyaṇa contains numerous references to subjects of aesthetic import such as painting, sculpture, music, the theatre, dancing and architecture. Every section of the epic is invaluable for the student of the art-history of India.[4]

Sanskrit literature of all kinds and periods makes incidental references to painting which, according to tradition, was one of the 64 arts practised in ancient India. It is frequently referred to in the epic. The paintings referred to by Vālmīki do not appear as objects of art in themselves but as an embellishment of walls, rooms, chariots and mansions. Rāvaṇa's Puṣpaka was decorated with transcendentally beautiful figures (V. 8. 2) and adorned all over with gold paintings (VI. 121. 24). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, the Puṣpaka is described as having been painted with images designed to fill the mind with reverence (VII. 15. 38). Mention is made of picture galleries (*citraśālā*) adorning Rāvaṇa's palace (V. 6. 36 ; 12. 13). Since Vālmīki always mentions them in plural (V. 7. 12; 12. 1, 13), there must have existed various kinds of *citraśālās* : those in the palaces, those owned by individuals and the public picture galleries situated in the heart of the city. The palace of Kaikeyī was furnished with *citragṛhas* or picture houses (II. 10. 13). The *śibikā* or hearse in which the corpse of Vālī was carried to the cremation ground had trees and birds painted on it. Likened to a wooden hill, it was painted on all sides with the figures of foot soldiers, had latticed windows, and was spacious and artistically and stoutly built, and decorated with beautiful carvings (IV. 25. 22-4). The litter in which Rāvaṇa's corpse was carried to the cremation ground is also said to have been adorned with various charming paintings of flowers (VI. 111. 109). Elephant's foreheads (III. 15. 15) and women's cheeks (IV. 30. 55) were painted in excellent designs. Flags of warriors had on them various figures (II. 84. 3 ; VI. 59. 15 ; 100. 14 ; 57. 26). A human head adorned the flag of Rāvaṇa, a snake that of Prahasta. The chariot of Dhūmrākṣa bore painted faces of deer and lions (VI. 51. 28), while that of Indrajit was adorned with gold and painted with figures of deer and a crescent (VI. 80. 13). Rāvaṇa's chariot was garnished with spectral faces (III. 35. 6); Rāma's palace with pictures of artistic excellence, the splendour of which captivated the mind and the eye (II. 15. 35). The *toraṇas* or gateways of the city of Laṅkā were ornamented with paintings of wreaths and creepers (V. 2. 18). "It may, therefore, be rightly assumed that from a very early period not only were sculptures and architectural details covered with thin plaster and coloured, but even flat walls of temples and palaces were decorated within and without with pictures or painted wreaths and creepers."[1]

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[1] Croce : Aesthics, pp. 162, 163 quoted in A. Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Śiva*, p. 23.

[2] See V. 13. 56, 59 ; 14. 1.

[3] A. Coomaraswamy : *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[4] George C. M. Birdwood : *The Industrial Arts of India*, part i, p. 25.

The magnificent stone pillars and carvings of Aśoka prove that a long period of art and skill had preceded them. The Rāmāyaṇa corroborates this by furnishing numerous references to sculpture which in ancient India went hand in hand with architecture. The prevalence of the art of image-making may be postulated in the age. The slender-bodied, spacious-hipped and moon-faced Sītā is likened by the poet to a wonderful golden image executed by Maya (VI. 12. 14). It is well known that Rāma, for sacrificial purposes, had got made a golden image of Sītā (VII. 99. 7). The sculptor who made the image must have produced a realistic figure inasmuch as he was a contemporary of the queen. The tents erected by Bharata's artisans on the way to Citrakūṭa contained images made of sapphires (II. 80. 18). The sleeping apartments of Rāvaṇa had statues of ivory, pearls, diamonds, coral, silver and gold (V. 9. 23). On the top of Rāma's palace there were many idols made of gold, and arches crested with pearls and diamonds (II. 15. 32). Gold-work was a highly developed art. Repeated reference is found to chariots decked or garnished with gold (II. 92. 33).

The celebrated Puṣpaka-*vimāna* of Rāvaṇa can well be taken as a model of artistic workmanship of the period. From the points of view of architecture and sculpture it was perfect. It is described as furnished with windows of gold, and beautified with gilt lotuses. Worked into it were birds made of lapis-lazuli, silver and coral, varicoloured serpents made of various precious metals and fair-bodied steeds. Birds were also carved with their wings drooped sportively and with graceful beaks and plumage—the wings decorated with flowers of coral and gold and appearing like wings of Cupid. Among other things executed by the sculptor were elephants possessed of graceful trunks, bearing filaments and lotus-leaves, engaged in showering water on Lakṣmī carved with fair arms and seated in a pool with a lotus in her hand (V. 7. 12-4 ; fig. 54).

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[1] A. Coomaraswamy : *A History of India and Indonesian Art*, p. 87.

Among other decorations of the Puṣpaka may be noticed representations of goblins who seem to be supporting the car as it floated in the aerial regions. They are described as adorned with *kuṇḍalas* or ear-rings and pot-bellied (V. 8. 7). The pillars that supported the Puṣpaka were all golden, well executed, radiant and decorated with *īhāmṛgas* (V. 9. 13 ; fig. 55).[1] The pillars are further described as "illumined by excellent females (figures) as it were" (V. 7. 7), which means that carved figures of the gentler sex adorned the shaft of the pillar and pilaster. Under the pillars and pilasters, the plinth of the structure was decorated with a frieze of geese (as is apparent from Vālmīki's description that the Puṣpaka appeared to be borne as it were by excellent geese, V. 7. 7). Small wonder, if such a piece of excellent art like the Puṣpaka was lauded by Viśvakarmā himself as constituting the acme of his workmanship (V. 8. 2).

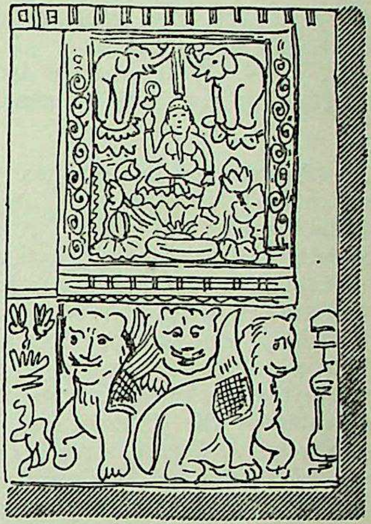

Fig 54. Lakṣmī on doorway; from Sāñcī, Sātavāhana, first century B. C. (Bhopal).

The Rāmāyaṇa sheds considerable light on the development of music as a technical art. *Gīta* (I. 4. 17) is the technical appellation given

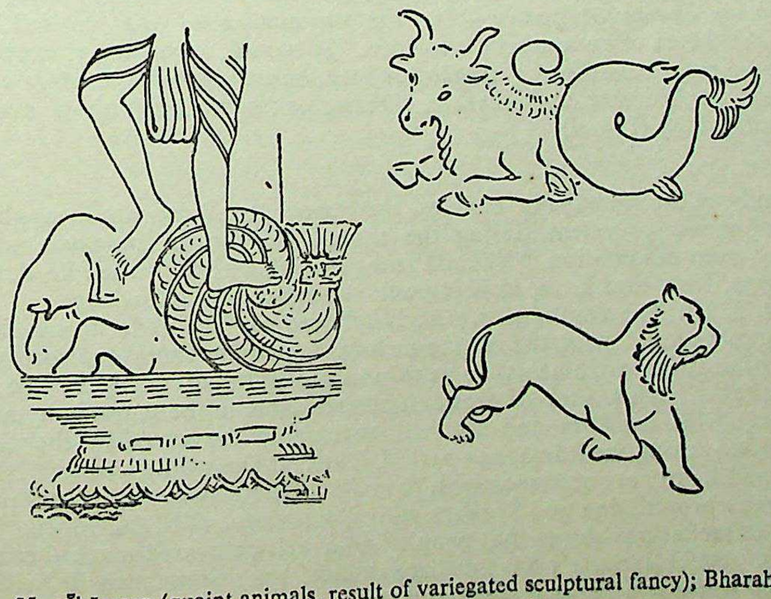

Fig. 55. Īhāmṛga (quaint animals, result of variegated sculptural fancy); Bharahu, Amarāvati and Jaggayyapetta.

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1. This should not be taken in the ordinary sense of an antelope. It means a mythical type of animal worked according to the fancy of the sculptor, and is a jumble of parts of beast, bird and reptile. (C. Sivaramamurti : *Some Architectural Passages in the Rāmāyaṇa*, *Journal of Oriental Research*, xiii. 2, pp. 87-92).

by Vālmīki himself to his work, thereby intending it as a composition not meant for recital only. The Rāmāyaṇa was a unique poetic-*cum*-musical composition of the day, consisting of sounds originating from six places, composed in excellent metre, having high meaning (*vicitra-padam arthavat*, I. 4. 1). The poem was universally acclaimed as a *gīta par excellence*, enrapturing both ear as well as heart (I. 4. 27-8), and its lyrical melody (*gīti-mādhurya*, VII. 94. 30) supplied entertaining fare both for sophisticated citizens and rugged foresters (I. 4).

Vālmīki has laid down certain requisites necessary for turning a poem into an entrancing piece of musical composition and has, thus, recognized an alliance between (Indian) music and poetry. According to him, the words in such a composition must be delightful to hear in recitation as well as in singing ; in other words, they should be capable of easy, appropriate intonation equally for a free song as for a restrained recitation (I. 4. 8). The music of the poem must be wrought with the triple measures of melody, tone and time, and must be capable of being reproduced in accordance with a recognized scale composed of the seven notes [Vālmīki simply refers to the employment of the seven notes in the Rāmāyaṇa (I. 4. 8), and does not make any mention of the different scales of music. But, as remarked by Sir William Wilson on the *Indian Empire*, a regular system of notation had been worked out before the age of Pāṇini and the seven notes were designated by their initial letters (*ṣa*, *ṛ*, *ga*, *ma*, *pa*, *dha*, *nī*) with an *a* for vocalisation.]

Vālmīki further stresses the adaptability of the entire composition to music by saying that it must be capable of being sung in the three speeds (*pramāṇas*, I. 4. 8), *viz*.. *druta* (quick), *madhya* (medium) and *vilambita* (slow). It must be adaptable for both instrumental and vocal music. Finally, the composition should never lose sight of the *summum bonum* of poetry—*viz*., the production of the desired sentiment (*rasa*) in the heart of an aesthetic audience. It should, accordingly, express one or more of these *rasas* beautifully : *śṛṅgāra* or love, *karuṇa* or pathos, *hāsya* or humour, *raudra* or the terrible, *vira* or the heroic, *bībhatsa* or disgust, *adbhuta* or surprise and *śānta* or tranquillity (I. 4. 9).

A study of the Rāmāyaṇa enables the reader to form an idea about three varieties of music prevalent during the time. The first of these was *svara-saṅgīta* or music of voice modulation. Vālmīki recognizes this variety when he describes the minstrel boys, Kuśa and Lava, as being well-versed in the knowledge of the seven *svaras* (I. 4. 5, 10) The class of *gītis*, already referred to, falls under this variety which mainly concerns itself with the raising or lowering of the voice (or, correspondingly the sound of musical instruments) so as to produce different tones in the same or different pitches. This sort of music, first noticeable in the Ṛgvedic hymns having three tones (*udātta*, *anudātta* and *svarita*), was highly developed by the Sāmavedins who flourished during the Rāmāyaṇa period. Thus, at Daśaratha's funeral, *sāma* hymns were chanted in strict consonance with the rules (II. 76. 18). The Uttarakāṇḍa describes Rāvaṇa propitiating god Śaṅkara with *sāma-stotras* (VII. 16. 33 4). The vogue of *Sāmaveda* recitations shows that people had a well-cultivated musical ear from very early times. At Daśaratha's Aśvamedha sacrifice, the priests recited Vedic *mantras* in measured tones and chanted sweet and soft *sāma* songs (I. 14. 8-9). This *svara* or vocal music seems to have embraced seven notes or *jātis* in three different pitches—*viz*., *tāra*, *madhya* and *mandra*—produced from their proper vocal organs known as *ṣthīnas* (I. 4. 10). In course of time, this music came to be transformed into intricate *rāgas* and *rāginīs* of specific varieties. In the Rāmāyaṇa, however, there is no reference to any *rāga* or *rāga* system.

The second variety of music is *varṇa-saṅgīta* or music of sound variation. This is essentially based on the triple difference of syllabic quantity, sound value and utterance period—which exists between the short and long sounds or *varṇas* of the alphabet. This variety of music is represented by the epic *anuṣṭubh* metre which is founded on *varṇa-saṅgīta* in its earliest form. Vālmīki on his own testimony was the originator of the *anuṣṭubh śloka* (I. 2. 18) which is a melodious verse-form, lucid with sweet and accented syllables, furnished with four even "feet," with rhyme and "time" complete, and capable of being recited according to measure to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument (I. 2. 18, 40, 42-3). Almost the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa is composed in this metre (I. 2. 41) (*śloka-baddhā*, I. 2. 36) wherein well-defined and regular variations of short and long syllables give rise to a singularly agreeable music. The musical character of the *anuṣṭubh* is repeatedly stressed by Vālmīki in the opening chapters of the Bālakāṇḍa. It could be sung in pairs (I. 4. 17) or in more than two *ślokas* together (I. 2. 39).

The third variety of music that can be discerned in the Rāmāyaṇa is *tāla-saṅgīta* or music of time-regulated stress or accentuation. There was a class of professional musicians known as *tālāpacarāḥ* (II. 3. 17) who specialized in *tāla-saṅgīta*, consisting in the time-regulated movements and gestures of parts of the body required in dancing. There was also a class of palm-players or *pāṇivādakāḥ* who indicated the end of each *tāla-gaṇa* or time moment by a corresponding stroke of their palms (II. 65. 4). Instruments such as *karatāla* and *svastika* were also employed to produce time-strokes. Players on these instruments led the vanguard in the royal procession on the occasion of Rāma's return to Ayodhyā from exile (VI. 128. 37). *Tāla-saṅgīta* was prominent at the musical repast provided by sage Bharadvāja when the role of time-keepers (*śamya* or *tāla-janas*) was assigned to a separate class of performers (II. 91. 49).

It may now be examined what standard of perfection was expected by Vālmīki of the singers.[1] A good voice was the foremost qualification of a skilled singer. The voice had to be trained and had to be naturally sweet. It had to be mellifluous, flexible, having a range of three octaves and capable of executing trills and flourishes. Clarity in expression—distinctness and correctness of the sounds uttered—was no less desirable. The song must reveal its sense no sooner than heard (*viśrutārtha*), and must be capable of arousing right emotions in the audience (I. 4. 34).

Kuśa and Lava, our twin minstrels premier who popularized the Rāmāyaṇa, were blessed with sweet voice (fit for singers as well as conversation, I. 4. 10). They could sing melodiously and distinctly, and in a high pitch, with tone and accent deftly blent to suit the change in the 'argument' (I. 4. 33-4).

Vālmīki was of the opinion that the speaking voice, no less than the singing voice, should be one that befits the occasion and that it should be marked by requisite tones and accents. Rāma has given a beautiful description of an ideal voice while applauding Hanumān's speech : "Forsooth he has studied well all the grammars, for he has not used a single inelegant expression though he has addressed me at some length. No flaw was perceived in his countenance, eyes, forehead, brows or anywhere else. His words—brief, beyond all doubt, pleasant and uttered in a mild tone—readily came out from his chords and heart. He has uttered accents wonderful, ready, accomplished, auspicious and captivating. Whose heart would not be moved by these words?" (IV. 3. 28-33). The speech of Bharadvāja was a fine example of an orthoepic utterance in consonance with *śikṣā* or phonetic injunctions (II. 91. 22). Daśaratha possessed an august, sonorous voice becoming his status as a king, and the speech he made before his assembly, announcing his intention to retire, was delivered in mellifluous tones and was surcharged with the sentiment of "unexpectedness" (II. 2. 2-3). The voice of an inebriate swan has been frequently regarded as the ideal standard of a male voice. Rāma (II. 49. 13; 112. 15) and Bharata (II. 82. 10) are said to have possessed the melodious voice of an intoxicated swan, while Daśaratha is described as endowed with a voice reminiscent of the sonoriety of a kettle-drum (II. 2. 2). Correct intonation was duly emphasized in speaking. Bharata, on returning to Ayodhyā from Kekaya, felt that his voice had become husky (an ill omen, II. 69. 20). Vālmīki does not omit to stress the need of a *svara* propriety even in death lamentations, and describes the ladies of Daśaratha's harem, afflicted with sorrow, as wailing in warbles (*ruruduḥ susvaram*, II. 81. 8).

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[1] See P. C. Dharmā : *The Musical Culture in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Indian Culture*, iv. 445-54).

The personality of a hymnodist was an equally important factor in enhancing the pleasure of vocal music. Kuśa and Lava, full of grace and tenderness, resembling Gandharvas in form and verily seeming like two replicas of Rāma in body (I. 4. 11), could give a musical performance full of deepest import to an audience bewitched as much by their performance (VII. 94. 12-3) as by the superbness of the saga (I. 4. 26-8). Similarly, the comely courtezans deputed to seduce Ṛṣyaśṛṅga knew the importance of excellent attire and tinkling ornaments for heightening the effect of their songs as entices.

The minstrels had, of course, to possess a technical knowledge of music (I. 4. 10). A practical understanding of melody, notes, octaves (*sthāna* and *mūrchanā*, I. 4. 10) was necessary. A faithful reproduction of the song was duly emphasized. The singers had to possess a highly retentive faculty (*susamāhita*, I. 4. 13), since they had to memorize the whole epic and rehearse it well (I. 4. 12). They had to enter into the spirit of the poem (I. 4. 18), carrying out the instructions of their master (VII. 93. 17; I. 4. 13) without attempting to improve the original composition or supplementing it by musical flourishes (*yathāyogam*, VII. 93. 9). The singing had to be full and drawn-out to its length (I. 4. 20). The sense of the words set to music by the tones had to be brought out in its entirety by pronouncing the passage in full and without mincing (I. 4. 18-9). Clear enunciation of the song was equally stressed (IV. 33. 21).

Since the Rāmāyaṇa was sung by Kuśa and Lava who possessed the requisite qualifications in ample measure, their performance was most successful, the pleasure emanating therefrom being threefold—*viz.*, from the music (I. 4. 17), from the sentiment expressed (I. 4. 15-6) and from the realistic representation of the events (I. 4. 18). They recited the epic with a wealth of notes (*svara-sampadā*), yet in a duet (*sahitau*)—sweetly yet passionately, the more passionately as the audience praised (I. 4. 19-20). The volume and pitch of the voice varied under the control of the singers themselves, and their voices rang like the subtle echoes (*laya*) of chords (*tantrī*), thrilling the nerves, the intellect and the feelings.[1]

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[1] **S. C. Sarkar:** *Educational Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, **p. 162; I. 4. 34.**

The presence of an appreciative audience was obviously necessary to spur the reciters to greater and finer efforts. Applause at suitable intervals acted as an inspiration to the spirit of the performers. The ascetic audience before whom Kuśa and Lava first recited the Rāmāyaṇa was a sympathetic gathering aware of this fact, who gave the necessary impetus to the young performers by punctuating their efforts with right exclamations (I. 4. 17) and presents (I. 4. 20-6).

Music in itself was known as *gāndharvam* (VII. 23. 50), the science or principles of music as *gāndharva-tattva* (I. 4. 10). It had two parts—*gīta* or the vocal music and *vāditra* or the instrumental music (IV. 27. 27 ; 33. 21). The *mārga* style of singing, which is the system of singing followed in the Vedic rituals or sacrifices of the *ṛṣis* (now fallen into disuse), was adopted by Vālmīki in his musical composition (I. 4. 36). The style in vogue today is *deśī* or provincial, by which we mean 'regional' development thereby corresponding to the 'native' state of culture prevalent in various parts of India.[1]

Dancing, as a matter of course, went with music. The Uttarakāṇḍa lends support to the theory that the ultimate origin of classical as well as popular dances in India lay in the worship and ritual proffered to some deity ; Rāvaṇa sang and danced mirthfully during his adoration of god Śiva on the banks of the Narmadā (VII. 31. 44).

The varieties of dances were *nṛtya*, *nṛtta* aud *lāsya*. In *nṛtya* (II. 20. 10), different emotions are expressed by means of gesticulations and attitudes ; it is associated with nautch dancing. *Nṛtta* (IV. 5. 17) consists of time-regulated and rhythmical movements. *Tālāvacarāḥ* (II. 3. 17) or musicians keeping time were evidently indispensable in *nṛtta* dances. *Lāsya* (II. 69. 4) is a delicate dance accompanied by vocal and instrumental music and combining the elements of the other two forms (fig. 56).

From the imagery (of dance) depicting the behaviour of Kausalyā who was beside herself with sorrow, it can be gathered that dancing involved supple and buoyant movements of the limbs, melodious and high-pitched singing and a realistic manifestation of emotions by the performer (II. 40. 44-5). Indian dancing thus involves a profound study of the passions and emotions of the heart and a clear and practical exposition of them in the most artistic manner.

The theatre, known as *raṅga*, was as much popular as music. From a musical metaphor used by Rāvaṇa (VI. 24. 42-3), it can be gathered that

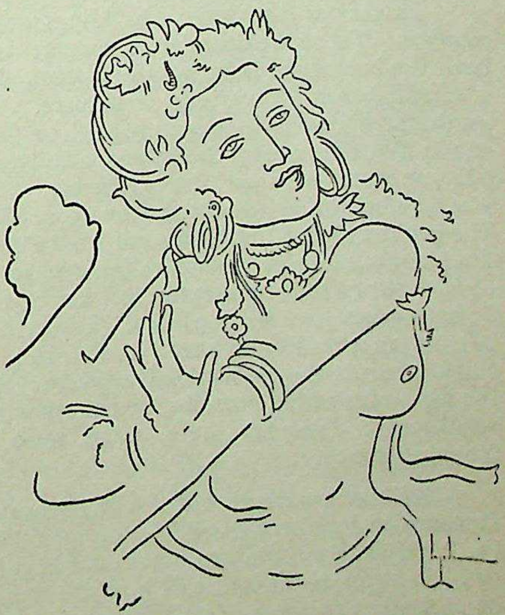

Fig. 56. Dancing Apsara, a fresco from Śittannavāśal cave temple (South India) ; Pallava, seventh century A.D. (Press Information Bureau, Government of India).

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[1] K. Sambamoorty : *A History of Indian Opera* (*Krishnaswamy Iyangar Com. Vol.*, pp. 421 ff.).

actors played on the theatrical stage. The Rāmāyaṇa controverts the theory of dumb show by mentioning *vyāmiśrakas* (II. 1. 27), meaning (according to the commentator) plays using Sanskrit as well as Prakrit. The word *samāja* occurs several times in the epic (II. 67. 15 ; 100. 44 ; 57. 13), and scholars have suggested that the idea of a *samāja* includes the audience of a dramatic representation. The word is often used in this sense in Sanskrit dramas, and references from them would bear out the interpretation of the word *samāja* as the audience of a theatrical performance.[1]

In the sphere of architecture, it can be seen from the descriptions of towns, palaces and forts given in the Rāmāyaṇa that India had attained a remarkably advanced stage well nigh approaching a science of architecture so to say. In the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa (canto 51), the story is told of how Maya acquired the knowledge of *śilpaśāstra*, the science of architecture, and the treasure of Uśanas (*auśanasam dhanam*) from Brahmā. This legend refers to the treatises of Maya and Uśanas (*i.e.* Śukra) which, though now lost, were mostly similar in character.[2] In the *Matsya purāṇa*, it is stated that both Maya and Śukra were once famous as two of the eighteen preceptors of *vāstuvidyā*. Other references to Maya and Viśvakarmā in the text show that the former was primarily an architect of southern India whereas the latter spread over the northern, eastern and western parts of India, a part of Deccan including even Ceylon.

Technical terms found in the later *śilpaśāstras* also occur in the Rāmāyaṇa. The terms *sthapati*, *vardhakī* and *takṣaka* were used to designate different classes of artisans employed in the construction of a house. In the later *vāstuśāstras*, the same terms have been used for different classes of artisans.

Palaces or ostentatious buildings were known as *prāsādas*, *vimānas*, *harmyas* and *saudhas*. There are descriptive passages in which two or more of these terms have been used together, indicating well-marked differences between them and suggesting a classification of various structures. *Prāsādas* are described as *saptabhauma*, *aṣṭabhauma*, *anekabhauma* and the like (‘*bhūmi*’ meaning a storey). This perhaps shows that the name *prāsāda* was usually applied to many-storeyed palaces. Usually, palaces were adorned with *śikharas*, domes or pinnacles, and one type of *śikhara* was also known as *vimāna*, as the expression *prāsādāgra-vimāneṣu* (II. 88. 5) signifies. The *saudha* type of buildings must have derived its name from *sudhā*, lime or any kind of plaster, and as such referred to whitewashed buildings. The definite nature of *harmyas* cannot be ascertained, but this word is also found in the *Vinayapiṭaka*. Some palaces had many pillars. Thousand-columned palaces are mentioned at two palaces in the Rāmāyana (V. 15. 16 ; VI. 39. 22). The *padma* buildings were so called because they resembled a *padma* or lotus. Houses without a door facing the east were called *svastika*, and those without a door facing the south were called *vardhamāna*. Besides these, there were buildings like a *vajra* (piston) or *aṅkuśa* (cone) in shape.

Buildings were provided with decorated arches (*toraṇas*) and courtyards, each surrounded by a row of edifices on all sides. A variety of *toraṇa* was the *jāla-toraṇa* (V. 2. 53) wherein the two columns are united above by triple arches with caryatids or plain supports at intervals between them, so that the whole upper part came to be compared to a net or trellis-work (*jāla*). Windows were either latticed or covered with nets of gold and silver. Such windows are beautifully described in many passages which show their importance as decorative elements in buildings. Over the house-tops were constructed, besides the *śikharas* and *śṛṅgas*, *candraśālās* or

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1. **R. V. Jagirdar : *Drama in Sanskrit Literature*, p. 43.**
2. **Tarapada Bhattacharya : *A Study on Vāstuvidyā*, p. 36.**

attic-rooms. In Rāvaṇa's palace, they were like half-moon or full-moon in shape. The *viṭaṅkas*, or small niches under the cornice for the habitation of pigeons or other birds, are just one more of the other features mentioned. *Valabhis* were another class of structures attached to a building and probably signified balconies or sunsheds under which the pigeons clustered. Elaborate staircases (*sopāna*) are mentioned in many places. They are said to have been built of jewels and valuable materials. The columns were tastefully decorated and set with precious stones.

The palace itself had seven concentric courtyards (*kakṣyās*) fitted with several gates. One could drive through the three outer courts, but then had to walk through the rest. The four outer courts were evidently either occupied by soldiers or were used as stables, stores, officers' and servants' quarters, etc. Of the three inner courts, the outermost was called *bāhya-kakṣyā* (VII. 37. 14) where the king transacted public business or 'audience.' The next inner court was the *madhya-kakṣyā* (VII. 42. 36) in which the king transacted his private and confidential business with spies, ministers, brothers, etc. The innermost court was the harem proper, occupied by ladies of the royal household to which only the king and his confidants had access. To this court was attached the Aśoka park for recreation of the ladies (VII. 42. 1). The chapels, the fire-worshipping rooms and the different apartments for the queens were also situated in this innermost section of the palace.

The Rāmāyaṇa contains descriptions of myriads of palaces noted for their architectural excellence. Rāma's palace was "as bright as the peak of mount Kailāsa, resembling the very abode of Indra, having huge beautiful gates with hundreds of balconies, with a golden statue for its sole crest, lovely with gems and corals, bright as the autumnal clouds, resembling the cave of Mt. Meru, adorned with large festoons of excellent gems, flashing with pearls and jewels, fragrant with the scent of sandal and *aguru*, emitting sweet and odorous scents like the peak of mount Dardura, resounding with sweet tones of swans and peacocks, with tastefully sculptured wolves and deer, attracting the eye and the heart of all creatures with its resplendent lustre, bright as the Sun and the Moon, resembling the abode of Kubera, the peer of the palace of Mahendra and full of various kinds of birds" (II. 15. 30-7).

Rāvana's palace is described as "white like snow and elevated like many palms placed upon one another." The mansions of the Rākṣasa nobles in Laṇkā are depicted as arrayed like lotus-leaves (V. 4. 7). Rāvaṇa's *caitya-prāsāda* in Aśokavāṭikā was a round structure supported by a thousand pillars with stairs made of coral and pavements of burnished gold ; its dazzling beauty, as it were, stole the vision of the on-lookers ; it was spotless and, on account of its height, seemed to touch the welkin (V. 15. 16-8). Hanumān is represented as violently uprooting a huge pillar of the edifice, plated with gold and having a hundred borders, and whirling it in the air to terrify the Rākṣasas (V. 43. 17-8).

The Uttarakāṇḍa thus describes the construction of Kumbhakarṇa's palace : "Architects resembling Viśvakarmā constructed an edifice beautiful to behold, measuring the smooth space of a *yojana* diagonally and two in area, graceful to the view, with no obstacle to hide its beauty. It was a splendid and delightful pile, adorned all round with pillars, decked with gold and crystal, having stairs studded with lapisis, furnished with networks of small bells, set with ivory gateways, containing daises dight with diamonds and crystals, elegant throughout like unto a goodly cave of the Meru" (VII. 13. 3-6).

Buildings for religioua purposes were no less artistic. Among such edifices may be mentioned sacrificial halls (*yajña-śālāḥ*), fire-altar (*agni-śālā*), temples of gods (*devāyatanāḥ*) and *caityas*. The sacrificial halls were generally temporary pavilions, but sometimes they were built of bricks. The sacrificial altar was made of bricks and had wings like those of Garuḍa and was seventy-eight cubits in length. An altar resembling Garuḍa is enjoined in the *Śulvasūtras*. There are no means of guessing what form the temples dedicated to gods took in that period. Sacrificial stakes (*yūpas*) are also described as being constructed by artisans and as having eight sides (*aṣṭāsrayaḥ*). The earliest *āstras* (from the time of the *Brāhmaṇas* downs) lay down the rule of making the *yūpas* eight-sided and, thus, eight-sided pillars came to be a favourite type in Indian architecture.

Although there are numerous descriptions of various kinds of architecture in the Rāmāyaṇa, the richness of poetic imagery used in them makes it difficult to ascertain the exact nature of the materials used in these buildings. Everywhere, the poet praises the jewelled windows, staircases and pinnacles, crystal floors and walls of gold and silver. Whether so much gold and silver, and so many precious metals were actually used cannot now be ascertained; but, archaeological excavations have proved that even in very early times, Indians had attained great proficiency in the jeweller's and lapidary's arts. Only in two or three passages of the epic, there are references to other materials. Bricks (*iṣṭakāḥ*) are said to have been used in the construction of halls and altars. The use of whitewash (*sudhā*), whether of lime or other ingredients, has been referred to.

It would be pertinent to examine here in brief the theory of Fergusson that India had only wooden buildings before the time of Aśoka. It has now been practically abandoned on the evidence of material furnished by the Mohenjo-daro excavations and Vedic literature.[1] In the present context, it would be worthwhile to see what basis the Rāmāyaṇa affords us for refuting the contention of Fergusson. The art of hewing stone (II. 80. 6-8), the use of such stone-piercing instruments as the *taṅka* and *dātra* (II. 80. 7), familiarity with digging and excavation work (II. 80. 12) and the practice of breaking up rocks by using fire (V. 1. 20)—all these point to a thorough acquaintance with the use of stone for different purposes. At Daśaratha's Aśvamedha sacrifice, structures with thousands of bricks were raised for the visiting dignitaries (I. 13. 9). There is also mention of pavements of brick and clay (II. 80. 13). From the description of the city of Ayodhyā—in the opening chapters of the Bālakāṇḍa and on the eve of the prospective *yauvarājya* ceremony of Rāma—with its lofty terraced buildings and halls inlaid with gems (II. 17. 17-8), it is not possible for one to reconcile the view that these structures were entirely made of wood and mud. Again, Laṅkā with its impenetrable fortress, atop a soaring hill, could not have been a mere wooden bulwark. Doubtless, the great conflagration which Hanumān set up in the mighty city (V. 54) leads to the inference that most of its houses were of wood, thus falling an easy prey to incendiarism. Nevertheless, stone edifices were not altogether absent in the Rākṣasa capital. Besides, there is an unmistakable reference to *śilāgṛhas* or stone houses (V. 41. 19). Hanumān, who stationed himself on the *toraṇa* of the Laṅkā citadel, pulled down a mighty slab from it and threw it at the enemy below (V. 44. 6, 10-1). Above all, the mention of golden pillars, of multi-storeyed buildings, of marble-laid floorings, of windows with the glimmer of pearls, and of gold palaces larded with diamonds and lapises (V. 2. 49-50) points to an advanced stage of stone architecture. Thus, there exists tangible evidence in the Rāmāyaṇa itself that goes to prove the very early use of stone for dwellings in India. And, in the light of such testimony, the theory of Fergusson falls entirely.

The palace architecture of the day was equalled, if not surpassed, by the superb garden-building. The Nandanavana of Indra's heaven stands as the celestial prototype of all the royal pleasances on earth. The Rāmāyaṇa gives a graphic description of Aśokavāṭikā, the *vihāra-bhūmi* (pleasure retreat) of Rāvaṇa in Laṅkā. It was surrounded by a wall, and inside the enclosure was a sylvan grove (*vṛkṣa-vaṭikā*) with the *sāla*, *aśoka*, *bhavya*, *campaka*, *uddālaka*, *nāga* and mango trees—all in blossom and in season. The garden was surrounded by artificial mounds, and contained herds of deer and flocks of song-birds. All around the place were various kinds of trees, and the earth appeared beautiful, strewn with heaps of fragrant charming flowers shed from trees. Nearby were tanks of various sizes, containing transparent and sweet water and fitted with bathing-*ghāts*, having beautifully made steps set with jewels and crystal posts. The bank was artistically lined with columns of trees, while the water-bed looked exceptionally beautiful with lotuses lilies in full bloom. The tank served as a spacious retreat for geese, the swans, the *cakravākas* and other aquatic birds. The trees on the banks were entwined with hundreds of creepers having flowering *santāna* and *karavīra* for diversions. Not for from these series of tanks was a high hill with a beautiful and wonderful peak. All elevations of this picturesque hill were decked with trees and hilly abodes. A long and beautiful stream of clear and sweet water issuing from it flowed through this garden. Its banks were artistically lined with trees, with their branches and creepers hanging low, as if ceaselessly trying to kiss the water. Beside the hill was a lotus pond throbbing with birds. There was also another big tank full of cool water. Its steps were all jewelled stones, and around it were many palatial buildings—all constructed as though by Viśvakarmā himself. And everywhere there were rows of artificial mounds and flowery groves to consent. The fruit and flowering trees had gold and silver pavements and terraces at their base. A large *śiṁśapā* tree, with spreading branches, adorned with creepers and fitted with a gold terrace at the base, added ineffable charm to the scene. In one word, the pleasance was like unto the heavenly garden of Nandana or of Kubera, or, perhaps, it surpassed both in excellence (V. 14-5).

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[1] See P. K. Acharya : *The Aspect and Orientation in Hindu Architecture* (*Indian Culture*, Jan. 1935).

CHAPTER XVI

FOOD AND DRINK

The food and drink of a nation and the method of preparing them have a direct bearing on its culture. Like wild beasts, savage men in all lands have lived on raw meat and fish. With the progress in civilization, men learnt to cook food and preserve it. Agricultural life, a diet of grains and pulses, and advancement in the culinary art were developed in a still later and higher state of civilization. According to Indian standards, a vegetarian diet has been a measure of spiritual progress and advanced culture, and a meat diet, or an immoderate indulgence of the palate, is considered gross and materialistic, tending to degenerate higher faculties pertaining to the spirit. The Rāmāyaṇa depicts the various levels of cultural advancement prevalent in the country during its period, and paints a society which was accustomed to both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food.

The comprehensive term for food used in the epic is *bhojana* (III. 12. 27) or *āhāra* (VII. 77. 19), which comprised all edibles composing a meal. The Rāmāyaṇa Aryans, as has been seen, were a highly civilized people and could prepare various kinds of vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian dishes. Indeed, they had made as much progress in the art of cooking as in the spiritual sphere. They were very fond of entertaining guests and of being entertained with rich and savoury dishes. Vasiṣṭha sought Viśvāmitra's permission to entertain him and his retinue with rich (*mahārha*) food (I. 52. 21). The harlots sent to entice Ṛṣyaśṛṅga lured him with savoury viands (I. 10. 20). Rāvaṇa tried to tempt Sītā with viands in the vain hope that she may succumb to his solicitations (IV. 62. 7).

Giving of food in charity was a highly commendable act. Plenty of food, clothes and money were distributed at the Aśvamedha sacrifices of Daśaratha (I. 14. 14) and Rāma (VII. 92. 19). To win the favour of the goddess Gaṅgā, Sītā promised to make a gift of agreeable foodstuffs to Brāhmaṇas (II. 52. 88).

The dietetic habits of the Aryans differed from those of the Vānaras and the Rākṣasas. Whereas the Aryans consumed both animal and vegetable foodstuffs, the Vānaras were pure vegetarians and the Rākṣasas non-vegetarians. At the reception given by Bharadvāja to Bharata's army, it was left to the guests to drink wine, to eat *pāyasa* (vegetable sweet dish) or to enjoy meat, as they liked (II. 91. 52). This fact clearly brings out that the Aryans were omnivorous.

The Aryans divided their dietetic preparations into five classes : *bhakṣya* or edibles that require mastication like cake; *bhojya* or food that may be eaten without mastication like boiled rice ; *coṣya* or suckable like gruel ; *lehya* or lickable like honey ; and *pāna* or drinkable like milk. Bharadvāja (II. 91. 20) and Guha (II. 50. 39) entertained their royal guests with food consisting of these varieties. The term *bhakṣya* (I. 10. 20 ; 13. 13) was also used to denote all kinds of edibles except rice and meat.

Vegetable foodstuffs predominated in the diet of the Aryans, meat and liquor being only a supplementary and optional part of it. *Taṇḍula* (I. 5. 17) or rice was the staple foodgrain of the people of Ayodhyā, while *nīvāra* (II. 61. 5) or wild (uncultivated) rice was used by the ascetics and sages of the forest. *Yava* (III. 16. 6) or barley and *godhūma* (III. 16. 6) or wheat were the other popular foodgrains. In the Uttarakāṇḍa, these were supplemented by pulses like *mudga* (green gram), *caṇaka* (chick-pea), *kulittha* (horse gram) and *māṣa* (black pulse) (VII. 91. 19-20).

Boiled rice constituted the staple food of the people. At Daśaratha's Aśvamedha, there were heaps of cooked rice, resembling hillocks, ready for distribution (I. 14. 15). A milky rice dish (*pāyasa*) was believed to act as *prajākara* or son-granting (I. 16. 19). Sage Bharadvāja provided excellent rice along with various eatables for the entertainment of Bharata's army (II. 91. 20). Huge heaps of rice are said to have been piled up for the voracious Kumbhakarṇa (VI. 60. 32). On the day of Rāma's proposed coronation, Vasiṣṭha ordered royal officers to bestow upon the principal Brāhmaṇas goodly and refined rice mixed with curds and milk so that large numbers may be fed and gratified, bestowing on them at the same time clarified butter and curds and fried paddy (II. 3. 14-6). Daśaratha laments thus for Sītā, voluntarily exiling herself with Rāma to the forest : "Having formerly partaken of excellent rice with curries, how will Sītā feed on wild rice ?" (II. 61. 5).

Among the varieties of rice and rice-dishes, mention may be made of *lāja*, parched or puffed rice, which was used as food and in worship. *Haviṣyānna* (III. 56A. 14) was rice boiled in clarified butter. *Kṛsara* (II. 75. 30; 20. 18), according to Wilson, was either modern *khichri* or a dish composed of sesamum and rice. If the latter, it must have been a sweet dish. *Modaka* (II. 20. 17) signified sweet balls made of rice, sugar and pulses. *Mṛṣṭānna* (I. 53. 3) was another savoury preparation of rice. *Pāyasa* (II. 75. 30), a favourite dish of the time, consisted of rice boiled in milk with sweets, its modern counterpart being *khīr*. The forest lands around Bharadvāja's hermitage are described as having turned muddy on account of an overflow of *pāyasa* while he entertained the army of Bharata.

The abundance of cattle in the country provided ample supplies of rich, vigorous milk. The conversion of milk into curds (*dadhi*) and the production of butter by churning were well-known processes. Streams of curds, called *dadhi-kulyās* (I. 53. 3), largely figured when Vasiṣṭha entertained Viśvāmitra's army. *Rasāla* was curd mixed with sugar and spices. Tankfuls of *rasāla, pāyasa* and curds mixed with sugar were available to Bharata's retinue at Bharadvāja's hermitage (II. 91. 73).

There are frequent references to *ghṛta, ghee* or melted butter (III. 73. 14; 72. 3; II. 20. 17). Oils—*sneha* (VII. 91. 20) or *taila* (V. 53. 8)—also contributed to the fatty element in the diet. Mineral salts were supplied in the form of *lavaṇa* (VII. 91. 20) or common salt and *sauvarcala* (V. 11. 16), the "glistening or fire-producing" salt-petre. Sītā is described by Daśaratha as accustomed to eating food consisting of various saltish dishes (II. 61. 5). *Amla-rasa* (V. 11. 18) or acid vinegar was added to impart a soury taste to the dish. Various condiments (*niṣṭhāna*, II. 91. 67), flavouring powders (*vāsacūrṇa*, V. 11. 23) and pepper (*marīca*) and other spices (*upadaṁsa*, II. 61. 5) were also in use.

Among other delicious dishes, Vālmīki mentions *gauḍa* (sweets prepared from sugar or molasses, I. 53. 4), *khāṇḍava* (sugar-candy, I. 53. 4), *rāga-khāṇḍava* (a preparation made of honey, sugar and fruit-juice, V. 11. 18), *sūpa* (vegetable broth, (II. 91. 67) and *uccāvaca bhakṣya* (dry sweets or pastries, I. 53. 2).

Fruits occupied an important place in the food of the people. Hanumān saw diverse kinds of fruits in the *pānabhūmi* or banqueting hall of Rāvaṇa (V. 11. 19-20).

During the rainy season, people lived on sweet rose apples and ripe mangoes of diverse colours (IV. 28. 19). For the forest-dwelling hermits, the fruits and roots of the wilderness, known as *vanya* (V. 36. 41), comprised their main diet. Rāma took to this mode of dietary during his forest exile (II. 28. 12). During his separation from Sītā, boiled rice and wild fruits comprised his meagre meal (V. 36. 41). It was usual for Lakṣmaṇa to roam the picturesque mountain slopes in quest of fruits (IV. 30. 14). Guha offered to Bharata roots and fruits gathered by the Niṣādas in the forests (II. 84. 17). Mangoes must have been very popular, as references to mango groves (*āmra-vaṇa*, I. 5. 12) are quite frequent. Fruits growing in the forest were astringent, bitter and pungent in taste (II. 12. 97).

The common fruits mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa are : *āmra* (mango, II. 94. 9), *badarī* (jujube, II. 55. 8), *dāḍima* (promegranate, VII. 42. 5), *ikṣu* (sugarcane, II. 91. 56), *jambu* (rose-apple, II. 55. 15; 91. 51), *kharjūra* (date, III. 15. 16), *kadalī* (plantain, VII. 42. 4), *nārikela* (coconut, V. 1. 200) and *paṇasa* (jack, II. 91. 30 ; 94. 8). Fruit-juices were used for mixing with soups and for making drinks.

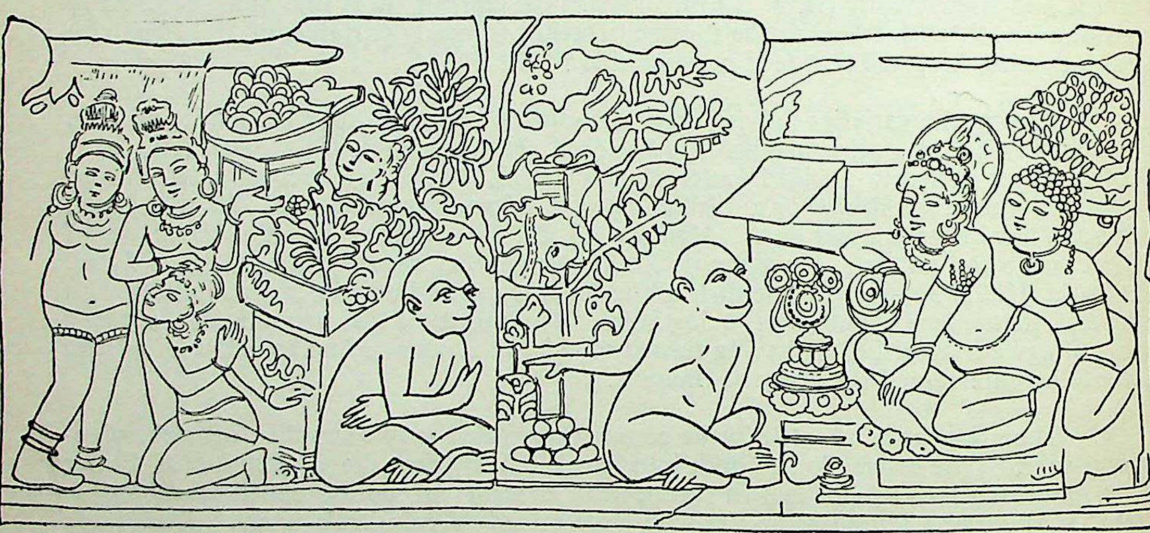

Fig. 57. Hanumān finds Sītā in Rāvaṇa's garden; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The practice of eating meat seems to have been quite in vogue among the Aryans and the non-Aryans. Sage Bharadvāja, in entertaining Bharata, arranged for different kinds of meat (II. 91. 21). Sītā promised to offer to the river goddess Gaṅgā liquor and *māṁsabhūtaudana* (*i.e.*, meat, rice, vegetables and spices cooked together), evidently her favourite dish (II. 52. 89). The edibles which Guha offered to Bharate consisted, among others, of raw and seasoned flesh (II. 84. 17). The Dāsas wera accustomed to feed on meat, fish, roots, fruits, honey and wild rice—food readily available in the jungles and on river-sides (II. 84. 10, 17, 7). Rāma consoled Sītā on the banks of the Mandākinī by diverting her attention to well-cooked meat preparations (II. 96. 1-2). Rāvaṇa's dinner comprised meat consisting of many ingredients, having diverse tastes, seasoned with many substances and dressed by skilful cooks (V. 11. 21-2). In *śrāddha* ceremonies, it was customary to feed Brāhmaṇas on meat-diet. Ilvala, the treacherous Asura of the Daṇḍaka forest, used to invite Brāhmaṇas of the neighbourhood on sham *śrāddha* ceremonies, and once offered them the meat of sheep which form his own brother, Vātāpi, had assumed (III. 11. 57). Meat of only castrated rams was offered to the manes in *śrāddhas* (I. 49. 9).

Among five-toed creatures, the *dvijas* ate the flesh of the porcupine, hedge-hog, iguana, hare and tortoise (IV. 17. 39). Though belonging to the class of five-nailed creatures (*pañca-nakha*), the flesh of monkeys was abjured by people of the upper classes (IV. 17. 39-40). There is no mention of beef as an article of diet, presumably for the reason that the cow was already considered sacred during the period. Even Rāvaṇa (V. 11. 14) and Kumbhakarṇa (VI. 60. 32) were served with only buffalo flesh and not beef.

The animals killed for food were classified as "clean" (*medhya*, II. 56. 26; 96. 2) or "unclean," the former alone being regarded as fit to be offered to the gods. In this category were included the goat (*chāga*, II. 75. 30), deer and boar. Venison was a favourite with the Aryans. On their first day of exile, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa hunted down four deer of the varieties of *varāha*, *ṛṣya*, *pṛṣata* and *mahāruru* for their evening repast (II. 52. 102). They killed many more in the forests near the Yamunā (II. 55. 32). Rāma, having killed Mārīca, hastened towards his hermitage and on the way killed a *pṛṣata* deer for the table (III. 44. 27). The flesh of boars was also largely consumed. Heaps of venison and the flesh of boars and buffaloes were served for the gratification of gluttons like Rāvaṇa (V. 11. 14) and Kumbhakarṇa (VI. 60. 32).

Meaty birds were highly valued as food (III. 73. 14). Among such water-fowls those recommended by Kabandha to Rāma were the *haṁsa* (swan), *plava* (duck), *krauñca* (heron) and *kurara* (osprey, III. 73. 12). These birds were plentiful in the Pampā region. The flesh of *kṛkara* (partridge) or *kṛkala* (lizard), *vādhrīṇasa* (a kind of bird), *mayūra* (peacock) and *kukkuṭa* (cock) was also in demand (V. 11. 15-6). In Rāvaṇa's banqueting hall, Hanumān saw cooked meat of peacocks and cocks in golden dishes (V. 11. 15).

The existence of separate classes of Dāśas (II. 89. 21) and Kaivartakas (II. 83. 15), who were boatmen and fishermen by occupation, makes it evident that fish was used as a foodstuff. Vālmīki at more than one place refers to the practice of angling (III. 51. 27). Fish were also killed by arrows (III. 73. 15). *Matsya* or fish was included among the presents offered by Guha to Bharata (II. 84. 10), and it was obviously meant to be utilized as food. Kabandha suggested to Rāma to taste the diverse and delicious fish of the Pampā lake (III. 73. 16). The Kirāta islanders in the east are described as subsisting on raw fish (IV. 40. 28). Fish devoid of scale and fins, plump, and filled with bones were highly prized and were partaken of after roasting (III. 73. 15-6).

Cannibalism was prevalent only among the Rākṣasas, and there are numerous references to their delight in feasting on human flesh and blood. In the Uttarakāṇḍa, there is a curious reference to the eating of even the flesh of a human corpse (VII. 77. 15-6), but the food is condemned as abominable (*vigarhita*, VII. 77. 19).

Notwithstanding this wide prevalence of meat eating, non vegetarian food was often looked down upon. When Rāma decided to live on roots, tubers and fruits for 14 years and abstain from flesh eating as done by the sages (II. 20. 29), he clearly set the vegetarian and abstemious diet on a higher plane. While telling Sītā of the forlorn condition of Rāma, Hanumān mentions how the noble prince abstained from meat and drink out of grief for her (V. 36. 41). Brāhmaṇas were generally vegetarians except, as has already been seen, on occasions of *śrāddha* and sacrifices when goat meat was served.

Public feasts on a high scale in which thousands of guests were sumptuously fed with dainty dishes were common on festive occasions. During the Aśvamedha sacrifice performed by Daśaratha, while the deities were being served their share of sacrificial offerings, the public of Ayodhyā was regaled with the best that the culinary art could provide. When King Viśvāmitra with his large retinue came to Vasiṣṭha's *āśrama*, the sage entertained the royal visitor and his entourage to a luxurious feast. The *menu* satisfied all the six tastes and five ways of eating and included conical piles of rice ; beaten, puffed and baked rice with curds ; pastries ; sugarcanes, honey and syrups ; *maireya* wines and costly spirits ; and a variety of soups and chops—all on silver plates or vessels. All the followers of Viśvāmitra were thus richly regaled and nobly fed, and were exceedingly gratified with the sage's excellent hospitality (I. 52. 21-3 ; 53. 1-6). Sage Bharadvāja, while playing host to Bharata and his army, offered them things such as ales and spirits, as also cool and sweet drinks like sugarcane juice, diverse kinds of food, wines and meat, all being arranged on wide lawns, soft with emerald grass. There were in evidence great copper vessels, decorated with flowers and pinions, containing curries of goat meat and ham, and savoury soups mixed with fruit-juices ; cisterns (*kūpas*) full of cream-and-rice puddings ; bowls of *maireya* ale with adjoining supplies of fried meats of various birds and animals ; and golden utensils by the thousand, full of various preparations of curd and butter-milk. Even the animals of the camp—oxen, horses, camels and elephants—were sumptuously fed with sugarcane and fried rice (II. 91). So irresistible was the succulence of victuals resembling ambrosia that Bharata's soldiers were not satiated.

Stress was laid on the observance of proper etiquette towards the invitees at social dinners. Sumptuous food was offered to the guests, whether townsmen or villagefolk, with affection and special consideration (*prītiyuktena cetasā*, I. 13. 17), and not with the difference that is usual on such occasions (*na tu līlayā*, I. 13. 14). All the *varṇas* were to be well entertained and offered their due regard (I. 13. 14). Bad or disrespectful temper was not to be shown to the guests. Skilled artisans and persons well versed in sacrificial work were to be entertained with special regard (I. 13. 15-6). In short, the whole affair was to be so well conducted and all were to be so well entertained with gold and food that nothing might be left wanting (I. 13. 18-9). For the guests, it was customary to confer blessings to their host at the conclusion of the feast.

Eating was to the ancient Aryans a sacred act which belonged more to the region of *dharma* than to *artha* and *kāma*. It was not a selfish act intended to gratify one's own palate but a dedication and an offering to gods, guests, friends and relations. From the partaker's point of view, it was nothing more than *prāṇa-dhāraṇa* (II. 95A. 37), a means of subsistence. Enjoying one's meal alone without sharing it with guests, wife, children and servants was reprehensible deed, the sin of which Bharata offered to take upon himself if he had been in any way a party to the banishment of Rāma (II. 75. 34).

The practice of saying grace before having food—*i.e.*, of offering it to the spirits before partaking of it—further shows how the Aryans treated the question of eating in a spirit of dedication. Because the Indians had plenty of food to spare, they could afford to be hospitable. Rāma made offerings of fruits, roots and venison to the spirits before entering his newly constructed cottage at Citrakūṭa and then ate the food with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā (II. 56. 33). The palatable dish—*kṛsara*—along with *pāyasa* and goat's flesh was not to be eaten until it had been offered to the gods (II. 75. 30). To deny oneself food so that another's appetite may be satisfied had been one of the virtues observed all along by Indians. There is a story told of Viśvāmitra who once gladly went without food, offering it all to Indra who came to him in the guise of a mendicant.

Among the varieties of drinks prevalent in the age, water was the most innoxious, suitable alike for the prince and the hermit. According to the traditional belief in India, water is the main sustenance of life (*pānīyam prāṇinaḥ prāṇāḥ*). During the forest exile of Rāma, water often served as his only means of subsistence at night (II. 50. 48; 46. 10). Kabandha advised Rāma to drink from a lotus leaf the water of the Pampā lake, "smelling like a lotus, coming in contact with flowers, delicious, pleasantly cool, wholesome, void of impurities and transparent like silver and crystal" (III. 73. 17-8). Great attention was paid to the purity of drinking water, and pollution of it was held as a sin equal to that of poisoning people (II. 75. 56).

Honey (*madhu*) was a popular drink. *Madhu* was offered to King Viśvāmitra when he was entertained by Vasiṣṭha (I. 53. 2). Bharata's followers were entertained, among other things, with honey by Bharadvāja (II. 91. 56). Daśaratha fondly hoped that Rāma might forget the pleasures of home when he roamed happily, drinking wild honey and hunting beasts in the woods (II. 36. 6). Honey was the staple drink of forest-dwellers like the Niṣādas and the Vānaras, and Guha, the king of the Niṣādas, offered it to Bharata when he broke journey at Śṛṅgaverapura on his way to Citrakūṭa (II. 84. 10). The Vānara parties, who went in search of Sītā, subsisted largely on the honey that was available in the pleasant woods. *Madhuparka* was a drink made of curds, *ghee*, water, honey and sugar. To be utilized as an intoxicant, honey was probably fermented to convert it to what was known as *mādhvīka* or *madhurasa* (V. 11. 23, 32) *Madhu-maireya* was a variety of liquor evidently prepared from honey (IV. 33. 7).

The art of distillation of liquors must have been well known. *Kṛta surā* (V. 11. 22) was the term intended to designate distilled wines. *Maireya* (IV. 33. 7; I. 53. 2; II 91. 15) was spiced liquor and *sīdhu* (V. 11. 32) was distilled from molasses. There are also references to wines extracted from fruits, flowers and sugar. *Maṇḍa* (II. 36. 12) was the name given to the spirituous part of the liquor. The liquor which lost its alcoholic effect by exposure was known as *pītamaṇḍa* (II. 36. 12) which nobody would like to use. *Sauvīraka* (III. 47. 45) was an inferior variety of liquor, probably the produce of the once famous port of Sauvīra. *Vāruṇī* (II. 114. 20) was the strongest spirituous liquor of the time, and was prepared from hogweed, ground with the juice of dates and then distilled. Its intoxicating properties were supposed to overwhelm a man the moment he drank of it. The two varieties of *vāruṇī* were *madhu-vāruṇī* and *agrya-vāruṇī* (VI. 12. 40). As opposed to *kṛta surā* (artificial wine), *surā* was natural wine, the product of fermentation. It was obviously a usual drink, as it is frequently mentioned in the epic (II. 12. 78; 91. 21). The costly and fashionable wine was called *surāgrya* (III. 47. 45). Refined (*suniṣpādita*) *surā* was served to Bharata's soldiers at Bharadvāja's hermitage (II. 91. 15).

The habit of drinking was universal. All classes of people, both male and female, kissed the cup. Daśaratha, during his quarrel with Kaikeyī, likens his love to her to good liquor which, after one has partaken of it, is subsequently found to contain poison (II. 12. 76). In describing the desolate capital, Ayodhyā, mourning Rāma's exile, Bharata says: "No longer does the exhilarating aroma of *vāruṇī* waft through the city" (II. 114. 20). The highways of Kiṣkindhā, the Vānara capital, were always redolent of the flavour of liquor (IV. 33. 7). Like the soldiery of all ages and climes, the Rāmāyaṇa soldiers were heavily addicted to drink. The Rākṣasa soldiers in Laṅkā are described as revelling in drink with their eyes looking wild with intoxication. They were drunk with the *sīdhu* wine when the Vānaras set fire to Laṅkā (VI. 75. 15). For soldiers, wine was the nerve-conferring draught (*pānam balasamīraṇam*, VI. 60. 91).

Drunkards extolled wine as a grief-dispelling draught (*sarva-śoka-vināśinī*, V. 24. 44), as it is considered even in the present age. The demon Vajrahanu boasted that he could despatch the entire Vānara army single-handed and invited his comrades-in-arms to do away with all anxiety by quaffing the delicious *vāruṇī* liquor (VI. 8. 22-3). Kumbhakarṇa is also said to have advised Rāvaṇa to drink *vāruṇī* and enjoy himself, shaking off all anxiety, as Sītā would certainly come round when Rāma would die (VI. 12. 40). The Rākṣasī guards of Sītā in Laṅkā proposed to kill her straightway and then dispel all their worries by feasting over *surā* and human flesh and by dancing merrily (V. 24. 42-5).

The effectiveness of the inebriating cup was enhanced by the intoxicating presence of women. Charming waitresses stood by to serve Rāvaṇa with wine in golden goblets (V. 18. 13-4). He perhaps thought that women could not be enjoyed thoroughly without meat, liquor and music. His drinking hall presented a scene with numerous women drinking and rolling on the ground (V. 11). At Bharadvāja's hermitage, the soldiers of Bharata, in the company of bevies of merry girls supplying them with drinks, shouted : "To Ayodhyā we will not go" (II. 91). Sugrīva celebrated his extraordinary fortune by giving himself up to wine, woman and song. He even enjoyed drinking with his ministers and the members of his assembly.

While crossing the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, Sītā vowed to propitiate the river goddesses with jars of wine and flesh and rice, if she returned safe with her husband from the 14 years' exile in the Daṇḍaka forest (II 52. 89 ; 55. 20). Since people offer to gods what they themselves eat and drink (II. 103. 30), meat and liquor must have been largely used by women. In the Uttarakāṇḍa, in his lovely Aśokavāṭikā, Rāma took Sītā by the hand and gave her the inebriating cup of pure, sweet, spiced liquor to quaff, while skilled women with the gift of beauty, urged on by the spell of heavy drink, danced before Kākutstha, ever filling with gladness that best of gladdeners (VII. 42. 18-9; fig. 23). Rāvaṇa frequently cajoled Sītā to drink and enjoy the pleasures of life (V. 20. 23, 35). For Sītā, however, the difference between Rāma and Rāvaṇa is as between choice spirits and sour rice-gruel (III. 47. 45).

The frequent mention of taverns is another indication of the wide prevalence of the drinking habit of the people. A tavern was called a *pānabhūmi* (IV. 28. 34). It is often depicted as a scene of wassail and disordered merriment. An ordinary tavern was the busy haunt of low class people where liquor was served in *śarāva* or earthenware drinking pots. Various means of entertainment were also in requisition for the recreation of the drunkards. An idea of the composition of a tavern can be got from a simile employed by Rāma in his description of the forest. The woodland, fragrant and resounding with the music of birds, is compared to a tavern where the flowers filled with water and dew are the drinking cups of liquor, the nectar of flowers is the exhilarating wine, the dancing and crying of the peacocks is the music and dancing of drunkards, the hum of the bees is the song and the elephants in rut are the reeling drunkards (IV. 28. 33-4). A low-class tavern (*a-saṁskṛtā pānabhūmi*) in Ayodhyā is pictured by Bharata comparing the metropolis, forsaken by Daśaratha and Rāma, to a tavern in which the best wines and liquors were exhausted, which was strewn all over with broken earthenware drinking bowls, and which was deserted by the drunkards and unsightly with the ill-swept floors littered with rubbish (II. 114. 14).

A scene of unabashed debauchery was witnessed by Hanumān in the *pānabhūmi* of Rāvaṇa (V. 11) : The inebriate Rākṣasas were railing, and hurling intemperate speeches, at one another, striking their chests and indulging in all manner of boisterous frolic. Every fair inmate was sleeping away the fatigue produced by amorous disports, and by music, drink and dance. The *pānabhūmi* was divided into chambers and was liberally supplied with everything one's heart could wish for—with various meat-dishes and fruits. The floor groaned under the weight of ornaments, drinking cups, dishes and fruits. The house was decorated with flowers and furnished with gold bed-steads and seats. It was well stuffed with various kinds of wine—all arranged in order. The beauty of the floor was enhanced by garlands of various kinds of flowers, and drinking cups of crystal, gold and silver. At a distance were huge wine-flasks, the mouths of which were covered with jugs, as well as gold, silver and jewel cups—some bubbling with wine, some only half full, some empty, while the contents of some had not been touched at all.

In such an age of prolific drinking, the virtues of temperance were none the less highly appreciated. Abstinence from liquor was always associated with a pious and saintly life. Sītā in captivity, pining for her lord, had nothing to do with drink and decoration (V. 11. 2). The Brāhmaṇas for fear of public slander, abstained from drink (II. 12. 78); so too the *ṛṣis*, though it is surprising to find sages like Vasiṣṭha and Bharadvāja acting as abettors in drinking. Drinking was contemptuously regarded as a *grāmya-sukha* (rustic pleasure) and was included among the ten vices (*daśa-varga*, II. 100. 68) which kings were asked to avoid. In pointing out the evils of drinking, Lakṣmaṇa told Tārā that the habit did not conduce to the attainment of piety or wealth, that it interfered with the pursuit of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, and that it deflected men from the path of virtue (IV. 33. 46-7). Lakṣmaṇa placed drunkards on the same plane as cow-slayers, thieves and men of no principles (IV. 34. 12). Rāma was justly angry with Sugrīva because, steeped in wine and women, he had neglected to fulfil his promise to find Sītā (IV. 30. 69, 79).

CHAPTER XVII

DRESS AND DECORATION

In the present-day world of wild flowery bush-shirts, it will be interesting to know that this wear of American origin has something in common with ancient apparel. Whereas, in one period, leaves and grasses were matted and used to cover the body, in the other, designs of leaves and grasses have come to be imprinted on cloth used in making a dress. From leaf and grass, man progressed to bark, and from that on to cloth. In the age of Vālmīki, all the three forms of dress were in vogue.

The flourishing textile industry of the country during the Rāmāyaṇa period accounted for the wide variety and profusion of clothes. References to clothes, myriad in number, are frequently met with (II. 99. 32). Janaka, at his daughter's marriage, gave away innumerable clothes (*koṭyambarāṇi dadau*, I. 74. 4). Among

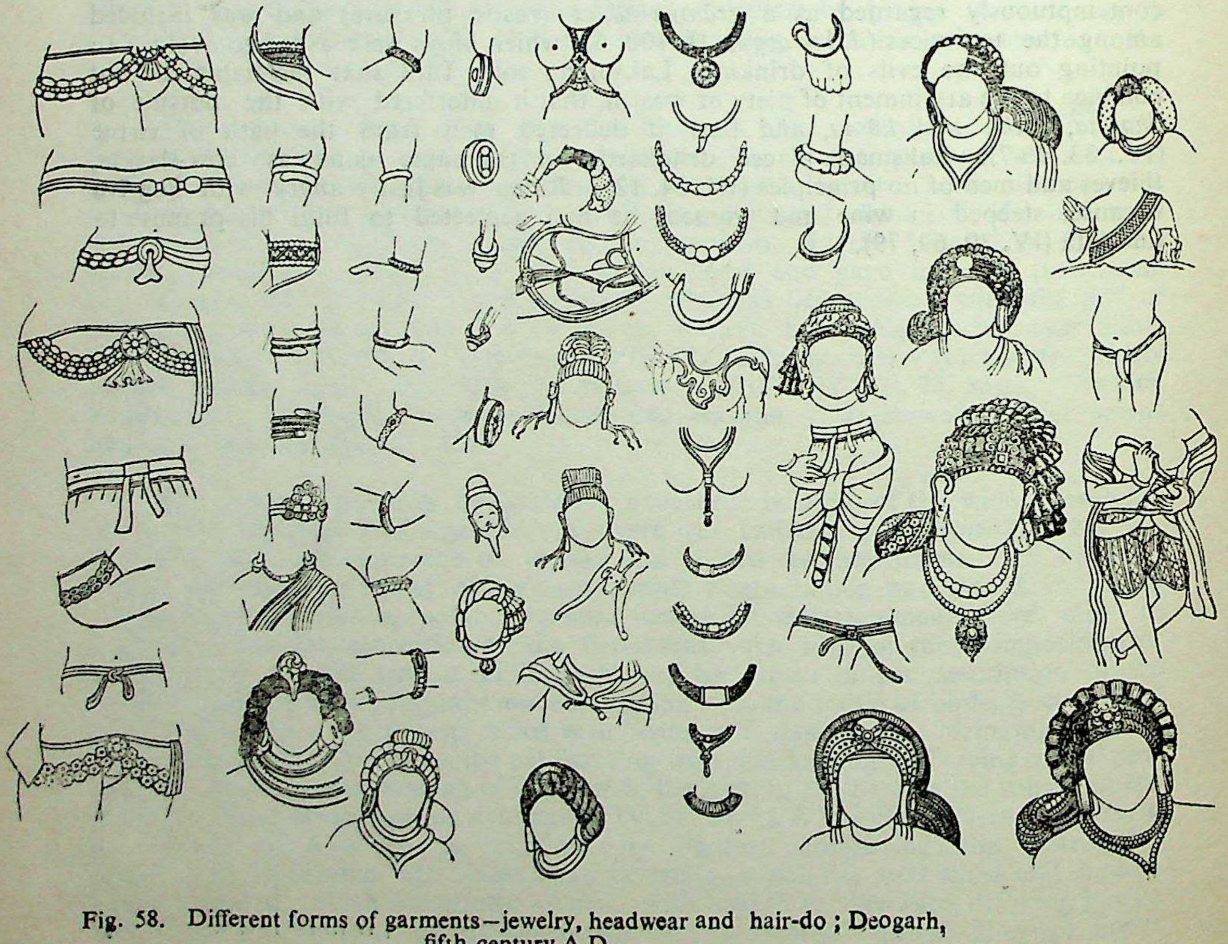

Fig. 58. Different forms of garments—jewelry, headwear and hair-do ; Deogarh, fifth century A.D.

the articles given away in charity, clothes figured prominently. Excellent clothes were distributed by Rāma and Sītā to their retinue (II. 30. 44-5) before departing to the forest. Heaps of clothes (II. 91. 76) were in evidence at Bharadvāja's hermitage. In the mighty conflagration raised by the Vānaras in Laṅkā, cloth of every description was reduced to ashes (VI. 75. 9).

Indian costumes have always been characterized by colour and glitter and an unusual quantity of drapery. The State pageantry of the epic age required a display of coloured and gorgeous clothing. The artistocracy used to don exquisitely fine muslin (*sūkṣma-vastra*, II. 37. 7). The forest-dwellers of Daṇḍakāraṇya were struck with wonder on beholding Rāma's tender grace, loveliness and elegance of dress (*suveṣatā*, III. 1. 13). The soldiers of the day took great pleasure in wearing beautiful and varied robes (VI. 53. 10). The assembly hall of Rāvaṇa was spread over with carpets of gold cloth (VI. 11. 15). In fact, gold and silver effects played an important part in the sphere of dress. Mention is made of silver and gold robes (V. 10. 7), and of excellent yellow cloth made of "golden" fibres (V. 15. 45). Rāvaṇa's robe was excellently fine, set with jewels, and white as the foam of churned nectar (V. 18. 24).

Women were no less fond of fine clothing, very much as they are now. Daśaratha's magnificent palace was thronged with excellently attired damsels (II. 5. 26). Comely maidens decked themselves in beguiling raiments. Rāvaṇa's harem was adorned with "thousands of superb women, decked in apparels of diverse hues and in wreaths" (V. 9. 33). The Apsarās were fond of wearing diversified garments (IV. 24. 34). Dress came to be so intimately associated with civilization as to influence the very thoughts and expressions of men, as evidenced by Vālmīki's employment of clothes as standards of comparison (VI. 5. 21 ; IV. 30. 46, 51).

Kauśeya or silk seems to have been much in vogue and was the favourite fabric with princesses. Sītā is called *kauśeyavāsinī* (attired in silk, II. 37. 9). In Rāvaṇa's Aśokavāṭikā, surrounded by *Ceṭīs*, Sītā is shown as clad in silk (VI. 126. 43-4). Brāhmaṇas generally wore *kauśeya*.

Kṣauma or linen was the sacred dress worthy to be donned during worship. Kausalyā was clad in *kṣauma* while worshipping in the royal chapel on the eve of Rāma's coronation (II. 4. 30). Rāma also, on the day fixed for his coronation, wore *kṣauma* during worship (*vimala-kṣauma-saṁvītaḥ*, II. 6. 7). The queens of Daśaratha were clad in *kṣauma* when they welcomed Sītā as a bride (I. 74. 11-2). Even a nurse in Kaikeyī's palace is described as dressed in white linen (II. 7. 7). Rāvaṇa used costly *kṣauma* as his nightwear (V. 10. 27) and, even after his death, was decked in the same material before cremation (VI. 111. 107-8).

Ajina (deer skin), *valkala* (bark) and *kuśacīra* (plaited grass) comprised the *muni-vastra* or ascetic garments. Softest deer skins were called *tūlājina* (II. 30. 12). Laced or bordered cloth catered to the needs of royal pomp and show. Sītā's *uttarīya* (upper cloth) is described as an excellent yellow cloth made of gold fibres (V. 15. 45). When Rāvaṇa was flying in the air carrying Sītā with him, her gold-gleaming silken cloth was seen ruffling in the welkin (III. 52. 17). Woollen clothes were also in use. Large numbers of woollen blankets, known as *kambalas* (II. 70. 19), were received as presents from Janaka (I. 74. 3-5) and the king of Kekaya (II. 70. 19). Cotton and hemp figure sparingly in the Rāmāyaṇa. Hemp was used mainly in making ropes. Hanumān at Laṅkā was bound up with hempen ropes (V. 48. 46), and his tail was wrapped up in worn pieces of cotton cloth (V. 57. 6).

The *brahmacārins* or students wore only one cloth evidently round their waist. The demon Mārīca, in describing his first encounter with Rāma, speaks of him as *eka-vastra-dhara* (III. 38. 14), clad in a single piece of cloth. Married or grown-up men generally put on two garments, a lower *vastra* and a shorter upper *uttarīya* (fig. 59). Bharata donned two *kṣauma* clothes before he went to see Bharadvāja (II. 90. 2). The *uttarīya* was worn by men in the same way as the *dupaṭṭā* is worn today in India, around the neck and flowing down from over both the shoulders. It was girt round the waist during exertion or fighting (II. 32. 37). The lower garment was much like the *dhotī* of the present day. Whether or not a part of it was drawn up between the legs and tucked in the back, as is done at present, is not clear.

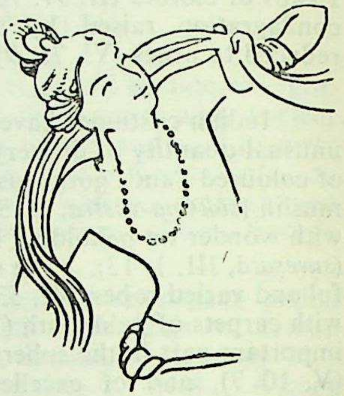

Fig. 59. Men's-wear, *ekāvalī* (a single string of pearls), *uttarīya* (upper cloth) and turban; Amarāvatī, second century A. D. (Government Museum, Madras).

It seems there was some difference in the dress of various castes, especially the Brāhmaṇas, so that it was possible to make out the caste of an individual on the basis of his habiliment. Thus, the demon Ilvala "assuming the form (dress) of a Brāhmaṇa and speaking polished language like a Brāhmaṇa" easily managed to pose as such (III. 11. 56).

Women generally wore *kṣauma* and *kauśeya* clothes. Like men, they too donned two oblong pieces of cloth—an upper one or *uttarīya* and a lower one or *adhovastra*—the distinction lying in the mode of wearing them. The *uttarīva*, thrown over the shoulders, served as a mantle that could be dispensed with when desired. While being carried away by Rāvaṇa, Sītā flung off from the air her gold-gleaming *uttarīya* to fall amidst Vānaras on the Ṛṣyamūka Hill (III. 54. 2-3). Obviously, Sītā rapidly took off her upper cloth, tied her jewels and threw the bundle over the hill without being noticed by Rāvaṇa (III. 54. 4), which shows that the *uttarīya* must have been simply put over the shoulders, loosely covering the body. The lower garment was worn round the waist, evidently tied with a knot. The *raśanā* or girdle served the purpose of tightening the lower garment.

Sītā wore only a one-piece garment during her captivity at Laṅkā (V. 15. 21). From this it appears that the woman's lower garment was a sufficiently longish piece of cloth that could be drawn to cover the body when required. When put to such a use, the garment served the same purpose as the modern *sārī*. It was tied round the waist at one end, carried over the shoulders and head, the other end being left loose.

When Rambhā, decked in a cloud-hued garment, was on way to her tryst, the sandal paste smeared on her body was easily visible (VII. 26. 15). This indicates the extreme fineness of the apparel she was wearing. The reference to the ends of *sārīs* disturbed by the softest breath (V. 9. 53-4), again, points to the fineness of the texture.

The practice of *kaccha* (*i.e.*, fold of cloth tucked in between the legs and fixed at the back) was obviously not adopted by women in these days. The blowing away by the wind of the garments of Añjanā, mother of Hanumān, and the consequent exposure of the charms of her body (IV. 66), could not have been possible if her cloth had been tightly fastened in the *kaccha* style of the present-day Mahārāṣṭra or Karṇāṭaka ladies.

For the fastening of the female bust, no jackets or bodices are referred to even in the case of aristocratic ladies. Sītā at Laṅkā is once said to have covered her abdomen with her legs and her breasts with her arms on seeing Rāvaṇa approaching her (V. 19. 3 ; fig. 60). Here it is plain that the breasts were not securely covered by any bodice and, though usually covered by the upper garment, could not be entirely shielded from view.

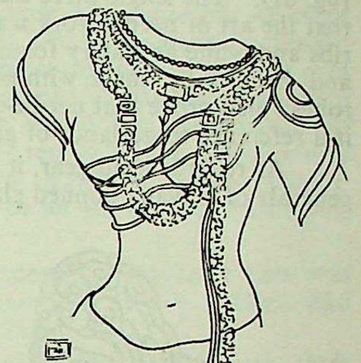

Fig. 60. Chowry-bearer ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Dyeing of cloth must have been fairly prevalent, as references to coloured clothes are frequent. When Rāvaṇa came to kidnap Sītā, she had on her a yellow silken cloth (III. 46. 13 ; 52. 14). This garment, though worn out by constant use, is said to have retained intact at Laṅkā its grace and colour (V. 15. 47). The blankets presented to Bharata by his maternal uncle were variegated in colour (*citra*, II. 70. 19). Tārā speaks of red-dyed bed-sheets (*kṛmi-rāga-paristoma*, IV. 23. 14). The Rākṣasas were fond of red clothing. Rāvaṇa is generally referred to as clad in red or scarlet cloth—*rakta-vāsas* (VI. 40. 6) or *raktāmbara-dhara* (III. 49. 9). He was also fond of milky white cloth (V. 18. 24). The garment of Kesarī's wife was yellow in colour with a reddish border (*pītam raktadaśam*, IV. 66. 12). The orange (*kāṣāya*) was the colour preferred by *parivrājakas* (III. 46. 4 . The old men guarding Rāma's *antaḥpura* were also clad in orange robes (II. 16. 3).

Although sewn clothes are not much in evidence in the Rāmāyaṇa, the art of sewing cannot be said to have been entirely unknown. The word *sūcī* (needle) occurs

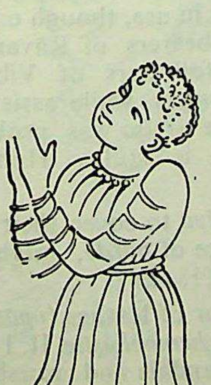

Fig. 61. Transparent upper cloth for covering breasts ; Pāla, eleventh century A.D. (Indian Museum, Calcutta).

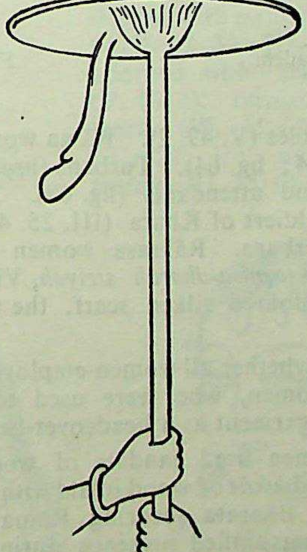

Fig. 62. Superior type of umbrella.

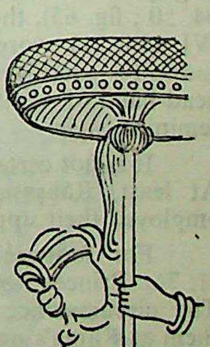

Fig. 63. *Kañcuka* (jacket), worn by an attendant ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

in the text at III. 47. 40. The word *tunnavāya* for a tailor is also used (II. 83. 15). The *kañcukas* (VI. 114. 21) or jackets worn by servants must have been sewn garments (fig. 61). The single-piece umbrella (*chatra*, VI 73. 14 ; III. 51. 17) suffices to show that the art of needle-work was known. Sītā refers to an umbrella "having hundred ribs and white as watery foam" (fig. 62 and 63).[1] Rāvaṇa's umbrella was also white and beautifully made with numerous clearly marked ribs (VI. 59. 24). The "golden robes" also prove that needle-art must have been very considerably in demand. There is a reference to garlands of gems threaded together with golden thread (II. 32. 5).

As regards head-gear, it appears the *mukuṭa* (coronet) was in common use. The generals of Rāvaṇa donned glamorous *mukuṭas*. A crown with tassels of pearls was worn by kings and nobles (V. 49. 2). Rāma wore a jewelled *kirīṭa* (diadem) at his coronation (VI. 128. 64 ; fig. 64). Turbans (*uṣṇīṣa*) were also in use, though confined largely to servants and attendants (fig. 69). The chowrie-bearers of Rāvaṇa (III. 64. 50 ; fig. 65), the soldiers of Khara (III. 25. 43) and the followers of Vibhīṣaṇa (VI. 114. 21) wore turbans. Rākṣasa women wore red *uṣṇīṣas* while assisting at Indrajit's sacrifice *raktoṣṇīṣa-dharāḥ striyah*, VI. 80. 6). The *uṣṇīṣa* was probably a head-band of multi-coloured silken scarf, the use of which is still a Himālayan feminine style.

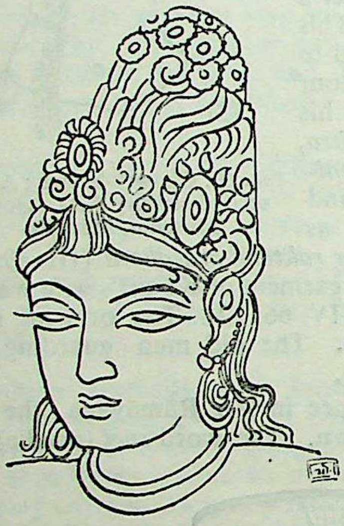

Fig. 64. *Kirīṭa* or diadem.

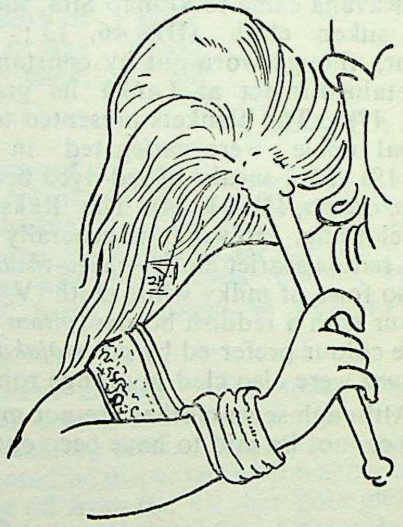

Fig. 65. *Chatradhara* or umbrella-bearer ; second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

It is not certain whether all women employed their *uttarīya* to cover their head. At least, Rākṣasa women, who were used to the practice of *purdā*, might have employed their upper garment as a headcover-*cum*-veil (VI. 111. 62).

For footwear, men used sandals of wood (*pādukā*) or of leather (*upānah*, II. 91. 76). Princes wore *pādukās* of wood inlaid with gold (*pāduke hemabhūṣite*, II. 112. 21). The circumstance of Bharata securing Rāma's wooden sandals and worshipping them as Rāma's own personified presence during his protracted exile, shows that shoes were an important article of wear and worthy of respect.

Next to clothing, ornaments occupied an important place. Brilliant ornaments are usually mentioned along with excellent robes as means of decorating one's person.

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[1] **II. 26. 10 ; another mention of a hundred-ribbed umbrella adorned with festoons occurs at III. 64. 45.**

Both men and women were fond of decking themselves with ornaments. The description of Sāgara as given by Vālmīki is typically illustrative of a well-adorned man of the times (VI. 22 18-21). Rāma as an unmarried youth wore a gold necklace (*kanaka-mālayā śobhayan*, III. 38. 14-5). When Hanumān met Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa for the first time near the Ṛṣyamūka Hill, he asked how they, deserving of every variety of ornaments, were bereft of them (IV. 3. 15). The love of ornaments extended to the Vānaras and the Rākṣasas as well. Vālī was the possessor of an excellent gold and bejewelled garland (IV. 17. 5). Rāvaṇa, clad in elegant apparel, was also dight with ornaments of polished gold (III. 35. 8-9). The soldiers bound for the battle front could not renounce their love for ornaments. In this they resembled the 19th century soldiers of Europe who fought in laced uniforms of gold and scarlet colour. Kumbhakarṇa was decked in choicest ornaments before he set out for the battle (VI. 65. 25-30).

The war weapons of soldiers were also well adorned. Rāvaṇa's bow was embellished with pearls and corals (*muktā-maṇi-vibhūṣitam*, III. 51. 10). Rāma had beautiful scimitars with golden sheaths (II. 31. 30 ; 99. 22).

The people's love for ornaments is further displayed by their zeal to deck their animals with fineries. Elephants, employed as an insignia of royalty, were covered with golden coverlets (*kāñcanī kakṣyā*, III. 52. 30) and girt round with golden girths (*kāñcanī kāñcī*, III. 52. 23). It was a common sight to find in cities long-tusked elephants, sixty years old, bearing bells on their neck, moving on the highways (II. 67. 20). They were also adorned with pennons and had golden seats on their back (VI. 127. 12). Horses were decorated with gold ornaments and spread over with golden trappings (VI. 102. 10-1). The steeds of a sport-chariot (*puṣpa-ratha*) were decked with gold ornaments (II. 26. 15). The chests of war horses were protected by breast-plates (*uraśchada*, III. 64. 46). The horns and feet of cows were ornamented with gold before presentation to Brāhmaṇas (I. 72. 23).

The art of adorning and decorating chariots was much advanced. Cars decked with gold are frequently referred to (II. 92. 33 ; III. 49. 19). They were adorned with standards and pennons (V. 45. 3), furnished with golden networks (VI. 51. 26), fitted with bells (III. 22. 15), and made of precious metals (III. 35. 6).

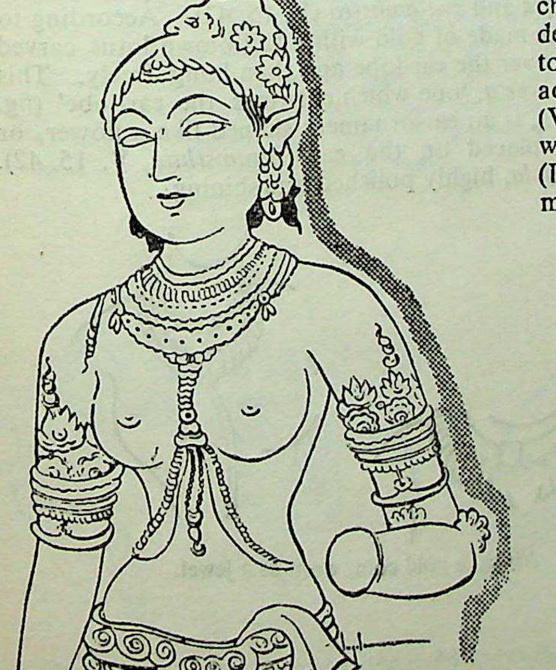

Fig. 66. Sītā from the Rāma group (from Vaḍakkupaṇayūr), showing beautiful flower-decked braid ; Cola, tenth century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

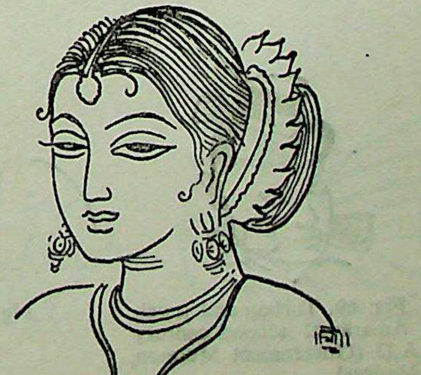

Fig. 67. *Cūḍāvalaya* or crest ornament.

The Rāmāyaṇa abounds in references to richly decorated women. A well-adorned damsel was the most natural sight for Vālmīki. He frequently compares natural scenes to decorated women.[1] Sītā in the forest was decked with all ornaments (*sarvābharaṇabhūṣitā*, III. 19. 17 ; fig. 66). Rāma asked Vibhīṣaṇa, after the victory at Laṅkā, to bring Sītā before him, bathed, sprinkled with celestial paste and adorned with celestial ornaments (VI. 114. 7). The wives of the Vidyādharas were decked in necklaces, anklets, *keyūras* and bracelets (V. 1. 26). Rāvaṇa's numerous mistresses are described as wearing various ornaments (V. 10. 31-4 ; 9 44-9). Their multitude of ornaments "appeared like beautiful lines of lightning" (V. 5. 22). The women in Sugrīva's harem wore the best of ornaments (IV. 33. 23).

Vālmīki mentions several varieties of ornaments for the different parts of the body. Among the ornaments for the head, there is the solitary mention of *cūḍāvaliya* (V. 54. 31 ; fig. 67) or crest ornament. *Tilaka* (II. 9. 49) was a gold ornament worn on the forehead "in the shape of a beauty-mark."

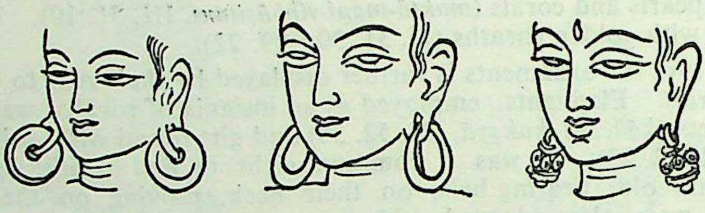

Fig. 68. *Kuṇḍala* and *ratna-kuṇḍala* (ear-rings).

The most common form of ear-jewel is the *kuṇḍala* (V. 22. 28 ; fig 68) or pendant shaped like a coil—a word obviously connected with *kuṇḍalin*, the Sanskrit word for a snake. For their dazzling brightness, *kuṇḍalas* are compared to the newly risen sun (V. 22. 28). These were made of burnished gold (*tapta-kāñcana-kuṇḍala*, III. 51. 1) and added to the beauty of the countenance (V. 36. 39). They were *sukṛta*, of good make, sometimes inlaid with gems (V. 22. 28). *Kuṇḍalas* are of various types, but the Rāmāyaṇa mentions only two : *karṇaveṣṭa* and *śva-daṁṣṭra* (V. 15. 42). According to C. Sivaramamurti, the former is a square made of gold with a full-blown lotus carved on it, the stalk of which is twice curled over the ear-lobe and then hung freely. This description fits in with the name *karṇaveṣṭa*, 'one which entwines the ear-lobe' (fig. 69). *Śva-daṁṣṭra*, also called *tri karṇaka*, is an ear-ornament shaped like a flower, or a dog's teeth. It is described as nicely placed on the ear (*susaṁsthita*, V. 15. 42). *Mṛṣṭa-kuṇḍala* is a plain variety of *kuṇḍala*, highly polished and shining.

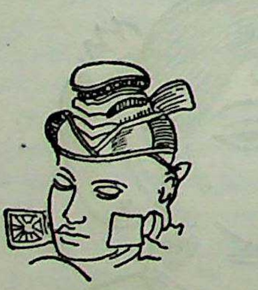

Fig. 69. Turban and jewel; Amarāvatī second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

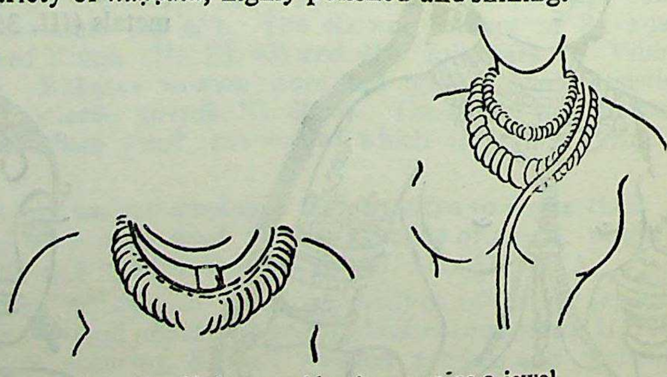

Fig. 70. *Niṣka*, a gold coin, worn as a jewel.

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[1] See II. 50. 23 ; IV. 27. 19 ; III. 75. 24-5 ; VII. 31. 22-4 ; V. 14. 13

Necklaces, or *hāras* (V. 9. 48), were popular among women as well as men. They were shining gold garlands inlaid with gems. Kumbhakarṇa is said to have set out for battle with a lustrous *hāra* embellishing his chest. *Hāras* are often described as having the sheen of lunar rays. The numerous names used to distinguish different kinds of necklaces show how varied these ornaments must have been. They were *graiveyaka* (III. 60. 31), *mālā hiraṇmayī* (II. 9. 47) and *niṣka* (V. 5. 25). *Niṣka*, a gold coin, was worn as a jewel—a practice of great antiquity (fig. 70). It was worn by Sītā (V. 5. 25) as well as Rāvaṇa (V. 46. 12).[1]

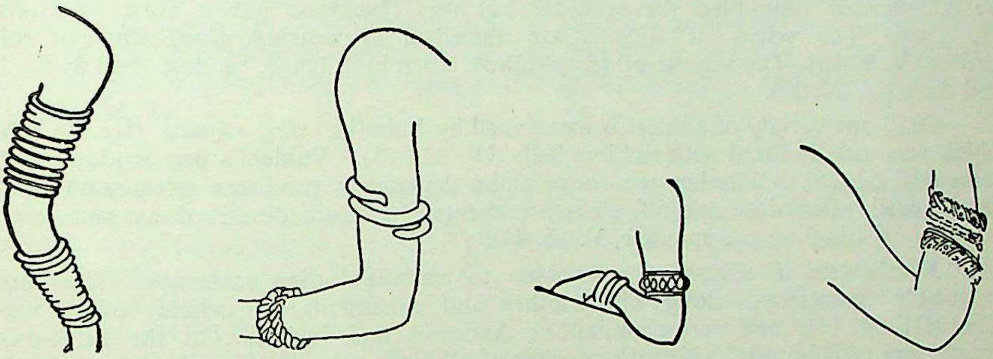

Fig. 71. A bracelet worn on the upper arm (*aṅgada*), gemset *aṅgada* and *ratna-kuṇḍala* (jewel string) ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Bracelets too were worn by men and women alike. *Hastābharaṇa* (I. 14. 54) was the common term for bracelets. Sītā's bracelets were made of gems and corals. A large variety of these is mentioned by Vālmīki. *Aṅgada* (II. 32. 5) or *keyūra* (I. 15. 17) was an armlet worn on the upper arm (fig. 71). *Keyūras* put on by the maids serving Rāma were made of gold and pearls (*maṇi-kāñcana-keyūra*, I. 15. 17). Armlets were sometimes angular at the top so that the wearers had to take care that the upper garment was not caught in them (V. 18. 24). *Pārihāryas* (V. 1. 26.) denoted bangles, and *valayas* (II. 32. 5) wristlets. *Ratna-valayas* (V. 15. 42) were wristlets set with precious stones and corals.

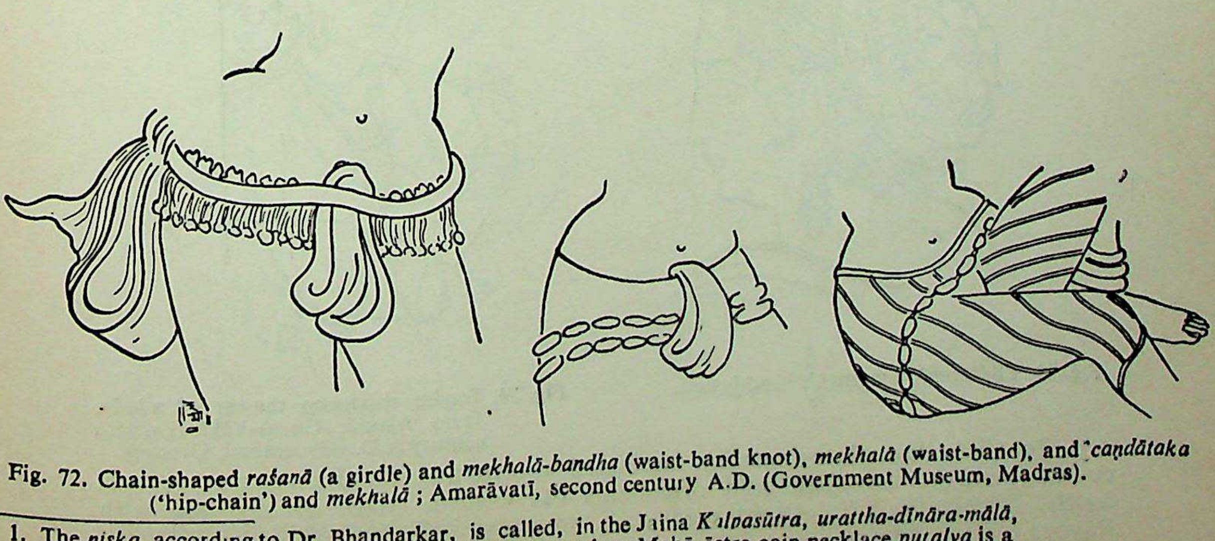

Fig. 72. Chain-shaped *raśanā* (a girdle) and *mekhalā-bandha* (waist-band knot), *mekhalā* (waist-band), and *caṇḍātaka* ('hip-chain') and *mekhalā* ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

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[1] The *niṣka*, according to Dr Bhandarkar, is called, in the Jaina *Kalpasūtra*, *urattha-dīnāra-mālā*, a string of dīnāras on the breast, of which the modern Mahārāṣṭra coin necklace *putalya* is a survival (C. Sivaramamurti : *Sanskrit Literature and Art—Mirrors of Indian Culture*, p. 58).

Aṅgulīyaka (V. 36. 2) was a ring. The name of the wearer was sometimes engraved on it. There is, however, no reference to its having been worn by women.

Girdles, in addition to their decorative value, helped to keep the lower garment in position. Those worn by women were variously known as *dāma* (II. 78. 7), *kāñcī* (III. 52. 23), *mekhalā* (II. 78. 7) and *raśanā* (II. 32. 7; fig. 72). *Dāma* was a waist-string sometimes made of gold (*hema-dāma*, V. 47. 6). *Kāñcī* was a gold-belt with tinkling bells. It was fitted with *hema-sūtras*, or pendant gold strings that hung about the hips (IV. 33. 38). *Mekhalā* was composed of strands of gems and was worn on the waist. *Raśanā* resembled the *mekhalā* but was fashioned like a cord or chain (V. 9. 49). The wives of Rāvaṇa are described as wearing *raśanā-dāmas* or roll girdles (V. 9. 46). The waist-cord (*śroṇī-sūtra*), worn by Rāvaṇa, is described as thick and dark (V. 22. 26).

Only one variety of anklets is mentioned by Vālmīki, *viz.*, *nūpura* (III. 52. 29), which was usually fitted with tinkling bells (IV. 33. 25). Vaidehī's was studded with gems (III. 52. 29). Whether gem-set or plain, the *nūpura* produces sweet sound and can be easily slipped on and off. The ornaments of Sītā are described as *svanavanti mahānti ca* (jingling and massive, V. 15. 46).

Jewels were a necessary appendage to ancient Indian costumes. They are invariably mentioned along with clothes and ornaments as articles of adornment (III. 54. 15), and were abundant in Ayodhyā and Laṅkā. On the birth-day ceremonies of Rāma and his brothers, gems of all kinds were scattered in the streets of Ayodhyā (I. 18. 19). The sea around Laṅkā was believed to be full of diverse gems (VI. 4. 119) with which the Rākṣasas in Rāvaṇa's assembly were all well adorned (VI. 11. 29).

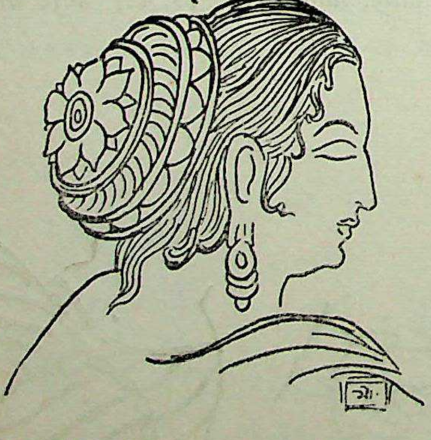

Fig. 73. *Cūḍāmaṇi* (a woman's head-jewel).

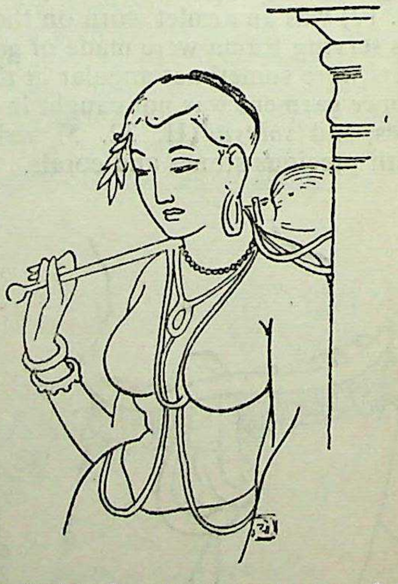

Fig. 74. Tender shoots on the ear of a lady, from Ajaṇṭā; Gupta-Vākāṭāka, fifth century A.D. (Hyderabad, Deccan).

Jewellery through the ages has fascinated women, and the Rāmāyaṇa age was no exception to it. The gold ornaments of women were usually set with jewels. Sītā had her breasts adorned with ornaments of pearls (III. 46. 20) when Rāvaṇa came to kidnap her at Pañcavaṭī. Among the jewels worn by women on the head, *cūḍāmaṇi* is the most important (fig. 73). It was worn on the hind end of the head. The *cūḍāmaṇi* of Sītā is described as a noble and excellent gem sprung from the sea (V. 38. 66-7). Usually it was shaped like a full-blown lotus with many petals composed of pearls and precious stones.

Besides jewellery, floral decoration also was prevalent. Feminine grace and attractiveness, as conceived in Vālmīki's day, could hardly be complete without the employment of buds, flowers, wreaths, blossoms and tendrils--all of which had their place in the aesthetic make-up of the fair sex (fig. 74). Sītā was very fond of *arjuna* (III. 60. 14), *tilaka* (III. 60. 16) and *karṇikāra* (III. 60. 20) blossoms, and her fondness for lotuses won her the title of *priya-paṅkajā* (IV. 1. 67). *Puṣpa-cayana* (picking flowers) was one of her fond pastimes (III. 63. 14). She decked her hair with flowers (III. 64 26-7) and lotus-petals. As she was being forcibly borne away by Rāvaṇa, her coppery fragrant lotus petals, being loosened, showered upon him (III. 52. 16, 26).

Floral decorations played no insignificant part in the adornment of the masculine figure too. Persons moving about wearing variegated garlands presented a familiar sight in Ayodhyā—something Bharata missed when he came to the metropolis after Daśaratha's death (II. 114. 23). In summer, costly sylvan wreaths were highly favoured by the youths of Ayodhyā for their cooling effect. There were separate stalls for the sale of flowers and garlands in the city (*mālyāpaṇa*, II. 71. 41). Rāvaṇa had charming and crimson-coloured garlands around his neck when Hanumān saw him in Sītā's presence at Aśokavāṭikā (V. 22. 25). Garlands and florets were a favourite bed-time "dressing" (IV. 15. 7). Flowers were also employed to decorate

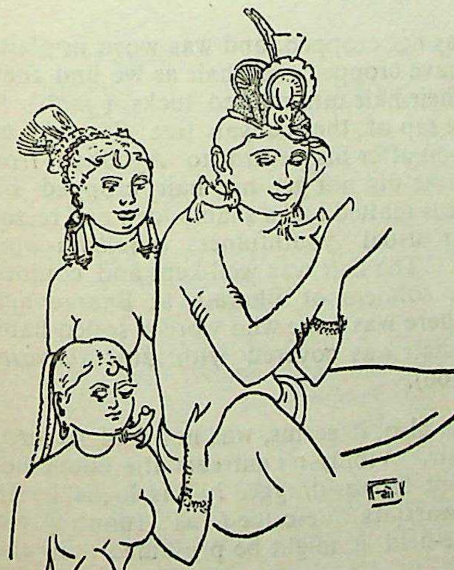

Fig. 75. A queen's braid decked with flowers; from Amarāvatī, Sātavāhana, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

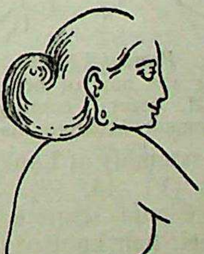

Fig. 76. *Eka-veṇī* or single-braid; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

a male head. The people of southern India were well-known for their peculiar habit of adorning their heads with perfumed blossoms (II. 93. 13).

Chariots, roads, cities, houses and palaces were decorated with flowers and garlands on festive occasions.

Toilet played an important part in the lives of the people. Both, men and women, paid meticulous attention to the improvement of their personal appearance by proper toilet known as *pratikarma* (II. 37. 35 ; fig. 75). A head with beautiful hair (*sukeśa*, V. 31. 16) was highly prized. Curly hair (*vakra-keśānta*, V. 31. 16 ; III. 63. 9) ending in a braid (*veṇī*, V. 19. 19) was acknowledged as a mark of feminine beauty. Female coiffure consisted in parting it in the centre of the head, combing the two halves separately and then braiding the hair and letting it dangle loosely down. In dressing the hair they used a *kaṅkata* (II. 19. 77) or comb. *Kūrca* (II. 91. 77) was the hair-brush. The parting line right along the middle of the crown of the head was known as *sīmanta* (VI. 22. 76) The braid was tied with *veṇī-grathana* (V. 28. 17). Sītā had a long braid of dark-blue hair reaching down to her hips (V. 19. 19 ; VI. 33. 31). A single braid (*ekaveṇī*, V. 65. 14) was the most appropriate mark of anguish for a woman during separation from her husband (fig. 76). Flowers figured largely in the decoration of the hair. Neglect of the coiffure was a mark of grief or violent excitement (II. 10. 9 ; V. 65. 14). Refraining from loosening the tied-up braid for cleansing and dressing was an indication of some strong feminine resolve, and the best compliment a husband could pay his wife was to fulfil her wishes and loosen the braid (VI. 33. 31 ; fig. 77).

The hair of men in all probability was not cropped, and was worn in plaits. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata could not have cropped their hair as we find them converting their hair into matted locks (*jaṭās*) by smearing the sap of the banyan tree (II. 52. 68; 100. 1). Even after his return to Ayodhyā from the exile, Rāma did not get his hair cropped but merely had his matted locks shampooed and restored to their usual youthfulness (*viśodhita-jaṭaḥ*, VI. 128. 15). The hair was well-kept and combed. Among the soldiers of Bharata at Bharadvāja's hermitage, there was none who wore a soiled habit, none whose hair was covered with dust (*dhvasta-keśa*, II. 91. 66).

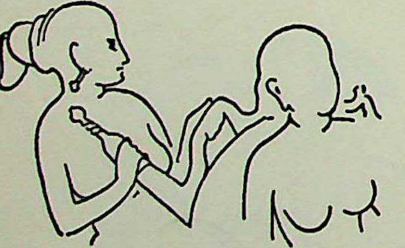

Fig. 77. *Prasādhikā* (toilet-maid), arranging the hair of her mistress ; Amarāvatī, second century A. D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Rāvaṇa also, it seems, was not used to cropping his hair. Vibhīṣaṇa entreats the councillors in the assembly at Laṅkā to save Rāvaṇa before he was dragged by his locks by the enemies (VI. 14. 19). From the Rākṣasa warriors described as running with loosened and scattered hair from the battle-field it might be presumed that they wore their hair knotted (VI. 52. 15 ; 56. 33).

From the fact that barbers, called *śmaśruvardhakāḥ* (VI. 128. 13), existed, it can be assumed that moustaches and beards must have been commonly worn. Shaving was done by professional barbers with razors (*kṣura*, III 47. 41). The barbers, who shaved Rāma on his return to Ayodhyā, are said to have been experts (*nipuṇa*) and deft of hand (*sukhahasta*, VI. 128. 13).

Side-locks of hair round the ears (*kāka-pakṣa*) were the special characteristic of the mode of hair-dressing for young princes in ancient India (fig. 78). Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, when they sallied forth with Viśvāmitra, are described as wearing side-locks (*kākapakṣadharāḥ*, I. 50. 21). Even in the present day, the Aryan fashion of shaving the hair on the crown and leaving locks on either side of the head is found in parts of northern India and among martial tribes of the Frontiers. In Iran, this fashion is known as *kākul*.

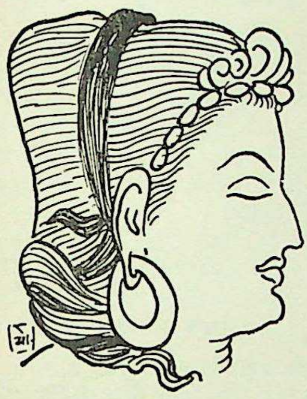
Fig. 78. Sidle-ocks of hair round the ears, *kāka pakṣa*.

Men in the epic age used to have a *śikhī*, a knot or tuft of hair, on the top of their head. *Dvijas* invariably wore the tuft. Rāvaṇa, as a *dvija* (III. 46. 35), is depicted as wearing a *śikhī* (III. 46. 3).

Anchorites of both sexes wore *jaṭās* or matted locks. These were tied with a cord or *jaṭā-bandhana* (I. 4. 24) in a heavy bundle called *jaṭā-bhāra* (fig. 79). Rāma, as an ascetic, is described as tying up his loose flowing *jaṭās* (and girding up his loins) to chastise Jaṭāyu whom he mistook for the demon that was supposed to have devoured Sītā (III. 64. 71).

Men's toilet mainly hinged round the ceremony of bathing. Use of scents and essences in the bath dates from time immemorial in this country. Before bath, the body was rubbed with oil and massaged. Anointing the body with perfume was called *udvartanam* or *ucchādanam* (II. 91. 53). *Saṁvāhanam* (II. 91. 54) was massaging. For removing the oil from the body, a tenacious paste prepared from powdered pulses or myrobalans—known as *kalka* (II. 91. 74)—was used for its cleansing action. It was ancient India's substitute for soap. Fragrant powders (*cūrṇa-kaṣāya*, II. 91.74) were also employed. Water used for bathing was scented with sandal (II. 65. 8).

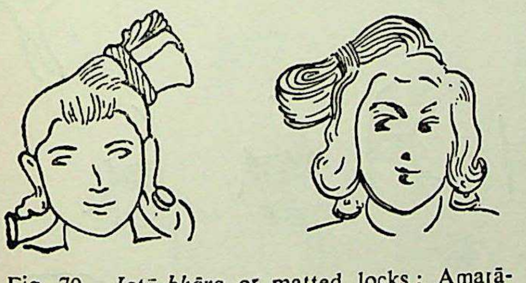
Fig. 79. *Jaṭā-bhāra* or matted locks; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Bathing had a purificatory implication (VII. 37. 13) and endowed one with lustre and freshness. Rāma, after his usual bath with paste, appeared shining in grace (VI. 128. 15). It was customary for Brāhmaṇas to gather flowers after taking a bath (III. 11. 52). In royal families, bathing was an elaborate process requiring a host of materials (*upaskara*, II. 65. 9) and the services of numerous attendants. Generally speaking, in royal families, the task of bathing men was entrusted to maid servants. Maids selected for the toilet of princes are described as young, beautiful, well-decked and properly-dressed (II. 65. 9 ; VI. 121. 3). It seems the art of shampooing, bathing, drying men's bodies was regularly taught to female attendants. Young maidens, who waited upon Daśaratha every morning with the usual articles of toilet, are described as *paryupasthāna-kovida* and *snāna-śikṣājña*, *i.e.*, knowing details of the process according to tradition (II. 65. 7-8).

Instances of mixed bathing of men and women are common in the age of the Uttarakāṇḍa. Rāvaṇa found the king of Māhiṣmatī enjoying his bath in the Narmadā in the company of his numerous queens (VII. 31. 9). Apsarās along with Yakṣas, Kinnaras and others used to enjoy their bath in the lake Sudarśana (IV. 40.

46-7). Rāma at the Agastya *āśrama* is said to have bathed at sunset in a lake where Apsarās were bathing and disporting themselves (VII. 82. 1-2).

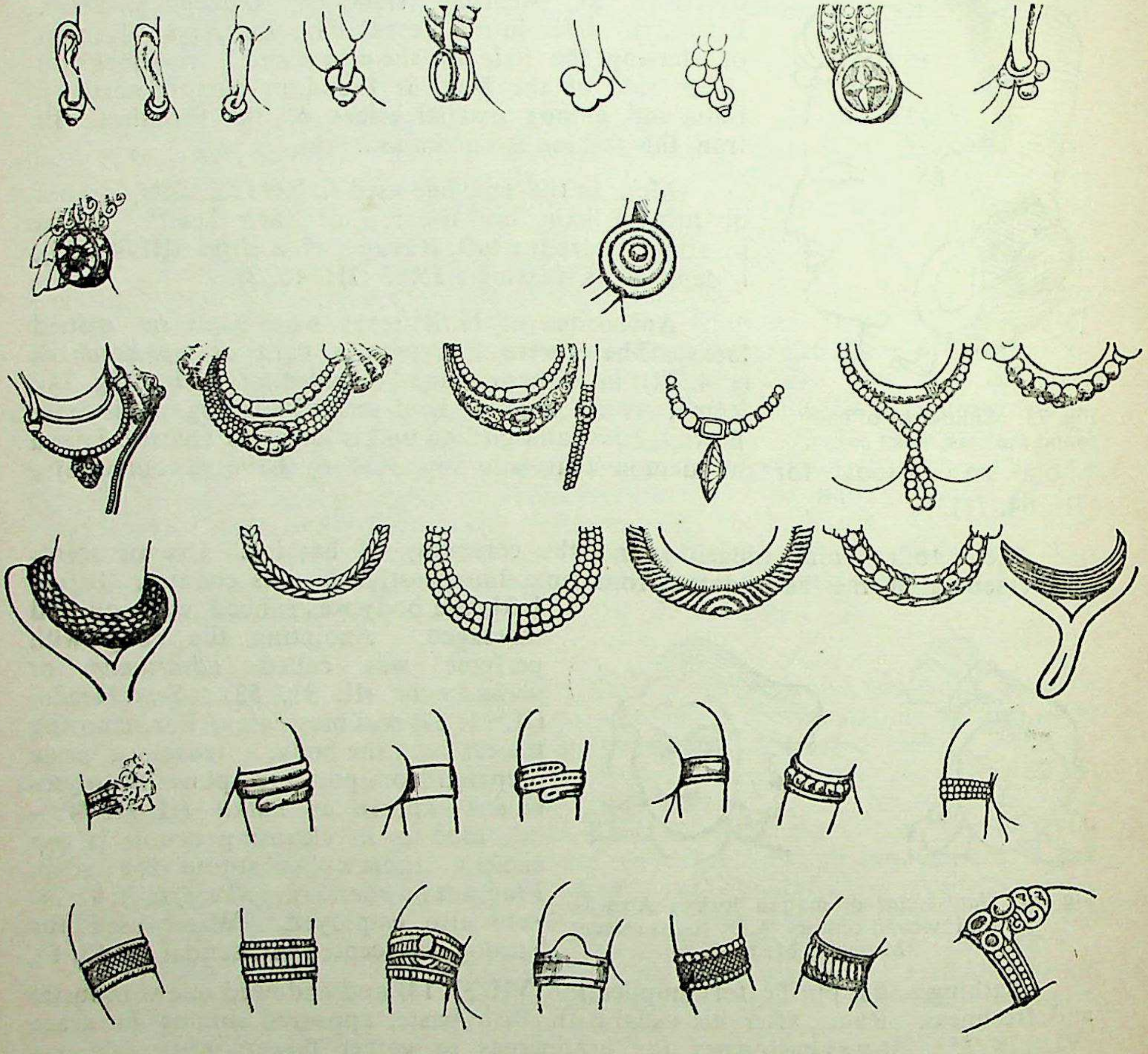

Fig. 80. Different articles of jewelry worn round the neck or the arms ; Deogarh, fifth century A D.

Hermitages of the day were provided with delightful bathing-*ghāṭs*, called *tīrthas*, on the banks of nearby lakes and rivers. Vālmīki is said to have taken his bath in the Tamasā at a *tīrtha* free from mud, where the water was "lovely and clear like the hearts of good people" (I. 2. 5-6). In the *āśrama* of Agastya's brother, there were secluded bathing-*ghāṭs* for the use of the *āśramites* (III. 11. 52). At Bharadvāja's hermitage, for the bath and toilet of guests, vessels containing varied shampoo and toilet powders and pastes were placed on the *tīrthas* of rivers, as also white-stalk tooth-brushes, sandals and shoes, bright mirrors, collyrium pots, combs and brushes. At the bathing-*ghāṭs*, there were carved and painted seats and beds for toilet and pleasure, and umbrellas and overalls; bows and arrows and suites-of-armour were also kept ready for the bathers. Besides bathing ponds, there were lotus-ponds full of blue water, and drinking pools for animals amidst well laid out plots of green (II. 91. 74-9).

Use of sandal and unguents—*candana* and *aṅgarāga* (VI. 121. 2)—was very popular among all classes of people. Cosmetics were universally employed in Ayodhyā; there was none in the city who was ungainly and did not anoint or perfume his person (I. 6. 10). The streets of the city were redolent of the aroma of *aguru* and *candana* (II. 114. 20). Rāma was habituated to rest on pleasant couches with his limbs perfumed with highly scented sandal which in colour is compared to a boar's blood (II. 16. 9). Bharata's soldiers at Bharadvāja's hermitage had their bodies decked with red sandal and *aguru* (II. 91. 58, 83). Because of its cooling effect, the unguent of sandal was specially preferred for allaying the heat caused by pangs of love. Rāma compares the sky covered with evening rays to a love-stricken person sprinkled with sandal (IV. 28. 6).

Rāma's breath is described as instinct with the fine perfume of the lotus (*padma-niḥśvāsam*, II. 61. 8)—a fact which hints at the practice of *mukhavāsa* as detailed by the treatises on *gandhaḥśāstra* or the science of cosmetics.

More than men, women of the age paid attention to their toilet to enhance their grace of form and bearing, much as they do now. Sītā did her toilet every day (*pratikarma-nityā*, II. 37. 35). At the termination of the battle of Laṅkā, she appeared before Rāma after bathing, performing her toilet and adorning herself with costly ornaments and clothes (VI. 114. 14).

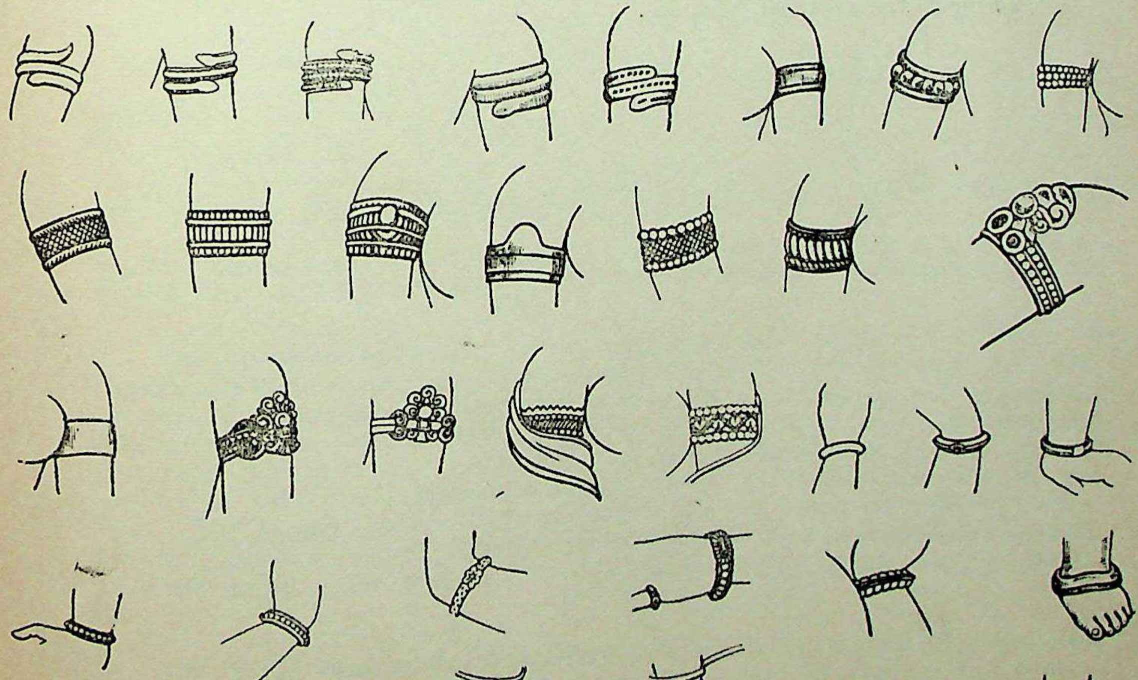

Fig. 81. Articles of jewelry worn at the arms, fingers and ankles; Deogarh, fifth century A.D

Women employed a host of soft artifices to make their loveliness superb. Various aromatic ingredients were used by them as perfumes and unguents They smeared their persons with sandal and saffron-paste. Debonair damsels in Rāvaṇa's harem are depicted as daubing their frames with paste (V. 5. 13). Sītā used to touch off her limbs with red sandal-paste and *aṅgarāga* (II. 33. 9). Anasūyā offered to her a precious ointment for painting her person with it in order to keep unimpaired the charm of her complexion (II. 118. 18-9).

Much attention was paid to beautifying the face. *Añjana* (IV. 27. 14) was used for blackening and beautifying the eyelashes. Figures (*patrarekhās*) were painted with yellow pigments on cheeks (IV. 30. 55); multi-coloured dots, called *viśeṣaka* (VII. 26. 17), were also done thereon. *Tilaka* (II. 95A. 18) was originally used by women as an amulet to win the affection of him they loved, but later it was employed as an offset to the forehead. Sītā dyed her feet with *ālaktaka-rasa* or lac dye (II. 60. 18 ; fig. 82). Special care and ornamentation of the feet and breasts is an ancient evidence of India's love for the sensuous. Sītā's breath is described as replete with fragrant odour and her face is termed as *sugandhi* (sweet-smelling, IV. 1. 109), which indicates employment of some facial cosmetic and breath-refresher. The countenances of beauteous girls in Rāvaṇa's palace are also described as odorous with *padma*-perfume (*padma-sugandhīni vadanāni*, V. 9. 36).

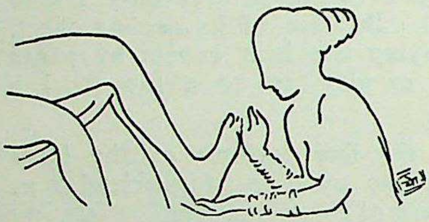

Fig 82. *Prasādhikā* (toilet-maid), painting the feet of her mistress with *ālaktaka* (henna-dye) ; second century A. D. (Goverment Museum, Madras).

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GAY LIFE

To the lay reader, the Rāmāyaṇa is apt to impress more as a pious epic than as a secular work. His attention is scarcely drawn to the numerous references it furnishes to the materially rich life led by the Aryans of the age. Indeed, the superficial view of ancient Indian civilization, that it was absolutely non-secular and spiritual, is controverted by a critical study of the Rāmāyaṇa, which contains abundant proof of the vital interest the Aryans took in worldly affairs and in the pleasures and comforts of life.

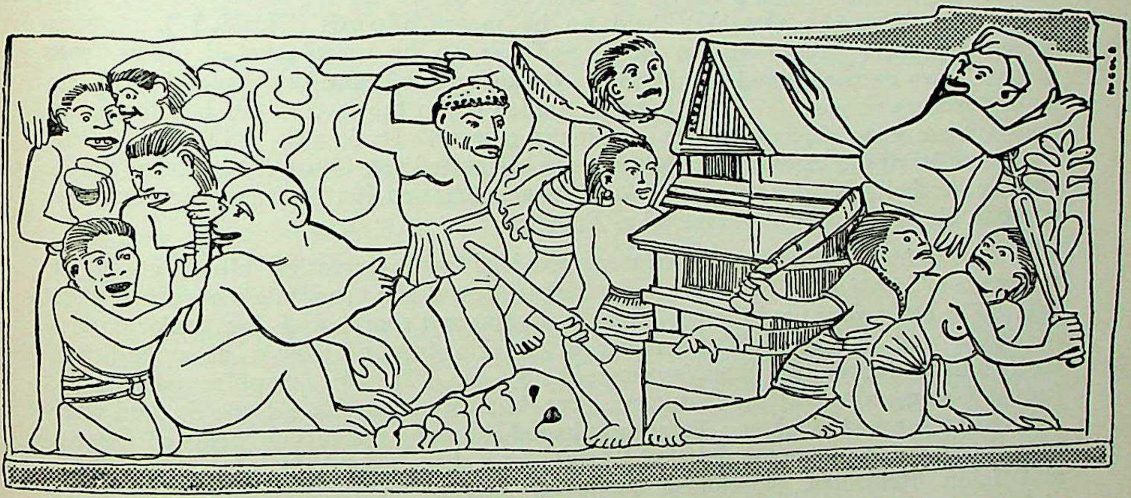

Fig. 83. Rākṣasas setting fire to Hanumān's tail; Hanumān jumping to Rāvaṇa's palace with his burning tail; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The princes and nobles of the times established and maintained traditions of magnificence in the matter of amusement and recreation The sacrifices of the Vedic age assumed in the epic period the character of grand ceremonies, providing ordinary folks with an impressive spectacle. Prevalent during the times were sumptuous and picturesque palaces, prosperous and well-laid cities, resplendent courts with hosts of servants of both sexes, dancers, musicians and actors, theatres, pleasure hills and parks. The people abandoned themselves to various pastimes, amusements and festivities, and were fond of glittering ornaments and costly and rare articles of toilet. All these go to prove that the Aryaṇs of the Rāmāyaṇa age had a great zest for life.

The capital cities of the times—Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā—were great centres of recreation and known for their many attractions. In Ayodhyā, for instance, the streets were filled with prosperous people racing along the highways in pleasure-chariots, drawn by spirited horses (II. 67. 25). Resort to public parks for sports, evening drives to suburbs, and riding on elephants and horses were some of the popular recreations of the period. Ladies too were given full opportunities for relaxation. They loved excellent garlands, sandal, ornaments, costly wines, comfortable beds and seats, and songs and dancing and music (V. 20. 9-10).

Celebration of social festivals reflects prosperity of the nation (II. 67. 15). Men and women of Ayodhyā are described as in happy mood, gay at meetings and festivals (II. 100. 44). Feast-days, particularly religious ceremonies, were frequent; all kinds of shows and entertainments, as also extraordinarily and befittingly arranged events, broke the monotony of life. Consecration of a king was attended by festivities on a gigantic scale. The capital was profusely decorated. Courtezans, dancers, priests, generals, merchants, citizens, provincials—all thronged the palace and the streets and made merry.[1]

One of the public festivals frequently referred to in the epic is the famous Indradhvaja. The standard was set up seven days before the full moon of the month of Āśvina (September-October), held up by means of cords (VI. 45. 17). It was waved day after day in all its glory, and then, on the day of the full moon, was thrown down on the ground (IV. 16. 37). Because of its beautiful colours (IV. 17. 2), its ornamental richness (IV. 34. 3) and its sudden fall to the earth, the banner is in constant use as an object of comparison in the epic (IV. 16. 39 ; III. 3.14 ; II. 74. 36). Full details of the manner this festival was celebrated are, however, wanting. It is clear, nevertheless, that it was a fertility festival celebrated in the harvesting season, comparable to the May Pole festival of Europe.

For indoor amusements, cities were provided with recreation clubs, going by the name of *samājas* (II. 67. 15), where religious, social and economic discourses were held. The clubs were used for gambling, for games and sports, and for performances of music and dancing.[2] Rāma refers to his kingdom of Kosala as embellished with clubs and festivities (*samājotsava-śobhitaḥ*, II. 100. 44). Popular gatherings, full of life and convivial in character, were known as *goṣṭhīs* (II. 69. 5) and were marked by fun and laughter. These were included among the various items of amusement arranged to please the dejected Bharata at Kekaya (II. 69. 5). In the Buddhist and Jaina literatures, mention is made of *samājas*, while Vātsyāyana gives an elaborate, yet pithy, account of *goṣṭhīs* in existence during his time. Sanskrit dramas, *kāvyas* and *bhāṇas* provide ample instances of these *goṣṭhīs*. It can accordingly be concluded that *samājas* and *goṣṭhīs* are the relics of the club-life of ancient Indians.

A common pastime was listening to the narration of ancient stories, handed down by tradition, of which there must have been a large fund during the Rāmāyaṇa period. The sages represented a veritable storehouse of ancient lore, and *kathā*-recitations were common. The inquisitive Rāma was entertained by Viśvāmitra with tales of absorbing interest (I. 23. 22).

There was a class of jesters (*hāsyakāras*) who waited upon kings and princes to amuse them with funny and witty remarks. At Kekaya, Bharata was provided entertainment by jesters (II. 69. 4). Court jesters (girls), known as *vādinyaḥ*, were directed by Daśaratha to accompany Rāma to the forest (II. 36. 3).

Kausalyā's palace was filled with all sorts of amusements (II. 19. 40). There were pet birds (VI. 75. 20 ; II. 65. 5), female parrots in cages (V. 13. 13), sportive

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1. I. 18.18 ; II. 5. 14 ; see II cantos 3, 4 and 15.
2. Tridibnath Ray : *Indoor and Outdoor Games in Ancient India* (*Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 1939, p. 261).

peacocks (V. 6. 38) and domesticated animals for the diversion of palace-dwellers. Sītā, imploring Rāma to catch the golden deer, had put forth the plea that it would beautify the interior of their forest-dwelling (III. 43. 17). The training of parrots and other birds pleasing to the eye must have been just one of the many recreations and pleasances of the palace. Kausalyā had a female parrot and a maina trained in uttering significant notes (II. 53. 22). Rāma's palace resounded with the notes of parrots (II. 88. 7).

Gambling with dice is the most ancient of such games, and it has long remained India's inveterate passion. References to this game in the Rāmāyaṇa are not so profuse or informative as those in the *Ṛgveda* and the *Mahābhārata*, and as such no comprehensive idea about the actual life led by the gamblers in the age is available. Nevertheless, these references, meagre as they are, unmistakably point to the prevalence of the game.

The term *dhūrta* (V. 9. 31) is employed in the Rāmāyaṇa in the original sense of a gamester (*cf. Ṛgveda's* condemnation of cheating at gambling as a frequent offence). Later, the word came to mean a cheat or deceit.

Two more terms used in gambling are also to be met with, *viz., devana* (V. 9. 31), meaning gambling with dice, and *paṇa* (VI. 61. 4) meaning a wager.

At one place, there is an allusion in simile to the pitiable condition of gamblers vanquished at a game. In describing the Aśokavāṭikā, the poet likens the trees, shorn of their foliage, to worsted gamblers stripped of their clothing and ornaments (V. 14. 15). Again, at V. 9. 31, the lamps at Laṅkā, burning with a dim light, are compared to gamblers given to gloomy ruminations in consequence of losses suffered at the game.

As regards the State's attitude towards gambling, it appears to have been one of disapprobation and even of condemnation, though it was never stopped by decree, probably because of the high regard for the freedom of the individual. Gambling with dice is included among the ten vices (*daśavarga*, II. 100. 68) which kings are enjoined to eschew. The severest stricture comes from Bharata who includes addiction to dice-play among the heinous acts : "its sin be on the head of him that perpetrated Rāma's banishment" (II. 75. 41).

Although there are no references to chess in the Rāmāyaṇa, two terms used in the text hint at the prevalence of the game, or at least a familiarity with it, as quite a plausibility. The terms in question are *aṣṭāpada* (I. 5. 16) and *caturaṅga-bala* (I. 69. 3). While describing the town-planning of Ayodhyā, it is stated that the capital's lay out was in the form of an *aṣṭāpada*. It is a game now known as *caturaṅga* or *shatranj, i.e.*, chess (India's contribution to world's recreations). The commentator Tilaka also explains *aṣṭāpada* as *dyūta-phalaka* or chess-board. Buddhaghoṣa in his commentary *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* on the *Dīghanikāya* has explained this term as a game on boards with eight rows having eight squares in each row. Evidently, the use of the term *aṣṭāpada* is a pointer to the popularity of the game during the age.

Again, *caturaṅga-bala* was the collective name given to the army in the Rāmāyaṇa epoch—as composed of chariots, elephants, cavalry and infantry (VI. 3. 25). This scheme of army organization was based on the ancient game of chess, also known as *caturaṅga*, in which the four-limbed army, led by the king, supported by the minister, encounters the opponent's paper army similarly deployed.[1]

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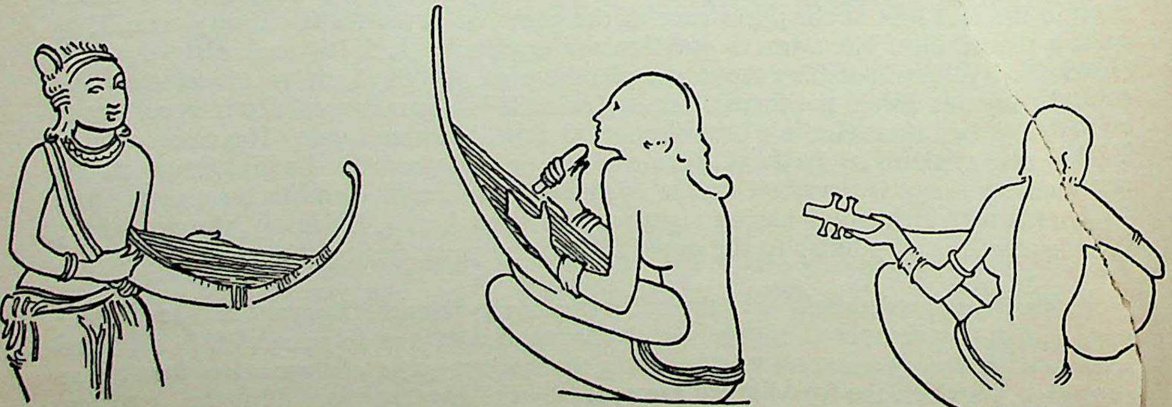
[1] See V. R. R. Dikshitar : *War in Ancient India*, pp. 153-5.

Amongst the most popular means of recreation were music, both vocal and instrumental, and dancing. Music was an inseparable feature of city life. Learnt, cultivated and enjoyed by members of both sexes, and among all strata of society, it was patronized by kings and commoners. It was not reserved for occasions of festivities and entertainments only; it was a common feature of the day-to-day life of the citizens. To the bustle of the traffic was added the incessant din of musical instruments. The cities of Kiṣkindhā (IV. 27. 26-7), Laṅkā (V. 3. 11) and the west coast (III. 35. 19) are described as resonant with music. When prince Bharata enters Ayodhyā, ignorant of his father's death, he is struck with the unusual absence of music in the streets (II. 71. 29).

Music featured prominently in the daily life of kings. Rāma (II. 88. 8), Bharata (II. 81. 1-2), Daśaratha (II. 65. 1-4) and Rāvaṇa (V. 18. 3) were woken up every morning with songs by bards. Musicians were, generally, in the vanguard of royal processions (VI. 128. 37). Rāvaṇa used to go to his assembly to the accompaniment of music (VI. 11. 9). Lakṣmaṇa heard in Sugrīva's palace well-measured musical strains, accompanied by the music of stringed instruments (IV. 33. 21). Music was played even at the funeral of kings like Rāvaṇa (VI. 111. 108). When Rāma returned home after his long sojourn in the forest, he was greeted by skilled musicians and by conch-shells, drums and trumpets (VI. 127. 3, 5, 21).

Martial music or *yuddha-gāndharvam* (VI. 52. 54) was common in ancient India. Armies marched both in peace and in war to the bars of the military band. The beating of the *bherī* was a call to arms. At the commencement of battle, during actual operations and after a victory—music was employed. Upon the recovery of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from the effects of the snake missiles, their troops expressed exultation by blowing aloud conchs, *mṛdaṅgas* and *bherīs* (VI. 50. 61-2).

Love of music made no distinction between a rugged forester and a sophisticated citizen. In the hermitages of the Seven Sages was audible the lilting music of Apsarās (IV. 13. 22). The musical repast Bharadvāja provided for Bharata and his retinue was on such a grand scale that a large variety of instruments must have been used in it (II. 91. 25-7, 49-51). The sages of the age used to propagate their musical compositions by teaching their pupils and sending them out to sing before large audiences. Vālmīki's own work was made known to the public for the first time by his pupils, Kuśa and Lava (VII. 93. 5). When



(*a*) (*b*) (*c*)

ig. 84. Harp-shaped *vīṇā* **(the Indian lute),** *vīṇā* **and** *koṇa* **(plectrum), and guitar-shaped** *vīṇā* **; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).**

Śatrughna and his party broke journey at Vālmīki's hermitage on their way to Ayodhyā, after the defeat of Lavaṇa, the poet entertained the guests with the performance of *Rāma-caritam*, the past history of Rāma, set to *Saṁskṛtā* or artistic music (VII. 66. 12). The recital was replete with songs sung in three octaves, to the accompaniment of stringed instruments, and set in time-bars of even value or duration (*sama-tāla*). The epic performance, which lasted a whole night, touched the emotions of the listeners, imparting to this a dream atmosphere (VII. 71. 14-20). Among the *ṛṣis*, too, the recitals evoked no less engrossing admiration and pleasure, emotions and tear, wonder and applause, and edification and blessing (I. 4).

Religious functions were invariably associated with music. When Bharata got news of Rāma's return from exile, he issued orders for the worship of gods in the temples of Ayodhyā with music (VI. 127. 2).

Women performers naturally commanded greater appreciation because of their ability to sing in the higher octaves and because of their natural sweetness of voice. The image of a woman in a forlorn condition reminds Vālmīki of a neglected unstrung lyre lying in a corner (V. 17. 23).

Natural tinkling of women's ornaments was highly relished. Belts and anklets of women were fitted with little bells for stirring sweet sounds.

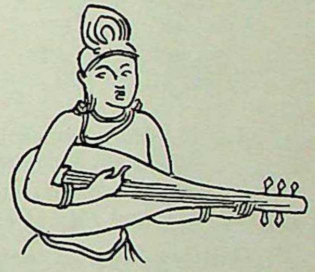


Fig. 84 (*d*)

Musical instruments were traditionally classified under four heads : *tata* or stringed instruments ; *ānadaha*, those struck like drums ; *suṣira*, tubular instruments like the flute ; and *ghana*, cymbal like instruments.

Among stringed instruments, *vīṇā* (V. 10. 37) was the most favourite instrument for accompaniment, pitch and time (fig. 84). It is the finest and most ancient of Indian stringed instruments. In shape it is supposed to resemble the body of a female by reason of its curved "neck," breast-like gourds and the frets akin to bracelets. The *vīṇā* was a six-stringed instrument sometimes played with a plectrum called *koṇa* (VI. 24. 42), the process being known as *koṇāghāta*. The seven-stringed instrument was known as *vipañcī-vīṇā* (V. 10. 41), *vallakī* (V. 17. 23) being still another variety of it.

The *ānaddha* or "beat" instruments included a large number of drums varying in sound pattern (fig. 85). *Bherī* (VI. 50. 62) was a special War Drum for inspiring epic heroes and legions with ardour for the battle. Other varieties of the drum being the *āḍambara* (V. 10. 45), *celikā* (V. 11. 6), *ḍiṇḍima* (V. 10. 4), *dundubhi* (VI 57. 28), *maḍḍuka* (V. 10. 38), *mṛdanga* (VI. 50. 62), *muraja* (II. 39. 41), *megha* (II 39. 41), *paṇava* (V. 10. 43) and *paṭaha* (V. 10. 39 ; fig. 86). *Kumbha* (VI. 60. 42) and *kalaśī* (V. 10. 46) were percussion instruments sounding like empty pitchers.

Among tubular instruments, *veṇu* or *vaṁśa* (flute, IV. 30. 50) is the most important, being the sweetest and most easily portable of musical instruments (fig. 87). Its sweetness derives from the breath of air escaping through the holes. *Tūrya* was also a common form of trumpet. *Śaṅkha* (VI. 51. 62) or conch was employed in giving publicity to some royal mandate or decree (fig. 88). The Rākṣasas of Laṅkā bruited Hanumān's penalty abroad by blowing conchs and trumpets (V. 53. 17). Conchs were largely employed as a war-signal (VI. 42. 35 ; 73. 13). *Śaṅkha* was used with other instruments like the *bherī* (VI. 35. 1 ;

50. 62) and *dundubhi* (VI. 42. 39), but only at intervals (II. 81. 2). Its sound is always described as deep and elevating.

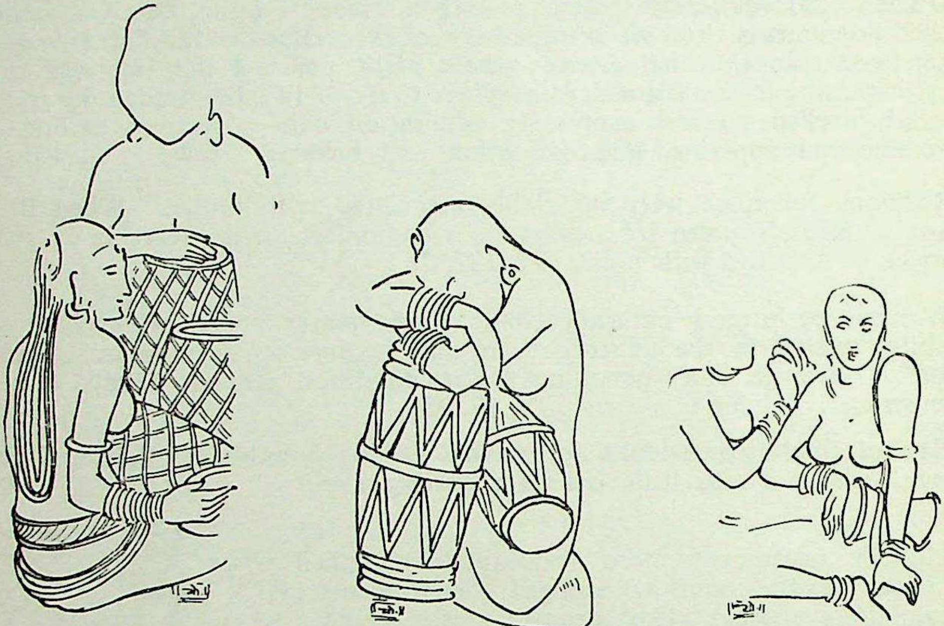
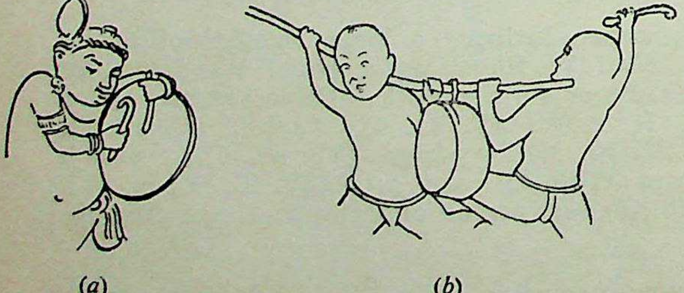


Fig. 85. *Aṅkya* (placed 'in the lap'), *āliṅgya* ('on the chest') and *ūrdhva* ('held up') drum. Amarāvatī, Sātavāhana, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Among resonators mention may be made of the *ghaṇṭa* (VI. 121. 26), *svastika* (VI. 128. 37) and *tāla* (VI. 128. 37).

Dancing was as popular as music; flute, lute and drum were its usual accompaniments. For example, among the entertaining companions of Bharata at Kekaya, while some indulged in lively dances, others played sweet instrumental music (II. 69. 4). Entertainment by melodious song-*cum*-lively dance was provided at Rāma's marriage (I. 73. 38). Dancing also figured a this birthday (I. 18. 17) and coronation festivities (VI. 128. 71). The soldiers of Bharata, during their stay at Bharadvāja's hermitage, are described as heartily enjoying song and dance, with garlands on (II. 91. 62). Gandharvas, the epic says, danced with joy at the death of Indrajit (VI. 90. 85).



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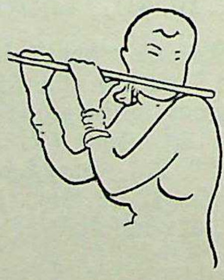

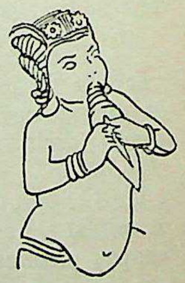

Fig. 86 A kettle-drum and a morning benedictory verse. Fig. 87. A pipe (*veṇu*). Fig. 88. Conch with and without metal pipe attached. Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

From the meagre references found in the Rāmāyaṇa, it can be said that drama, too, had attractions all its own during the period, though probably not to the same extent as song and dance—of shorter duration. His friends and associates are said to have tried to cheer up the dejected Bharata while at Kekaya with *nāṭakas*, that is dramatic performances (II. 69 4). The metropolis (of Ayodhyā) had theatres exclusively for women (*vadhū-nāṭaka-saṅgha*, I. 5. 12). Rāma was at home at performances with mixed languages (II. 1. 27). During anarchy, it is said, merry actors and dancers are conspicuous by their absence (II. 67. 15). Actors and dancers were grouped together as *naṭa-nartakas* (VII. 64. 3). They accompanied Śatrughna on his invasion of Madhupurī (VII. 64. 3). The spacious highways of Ayodhyā were filled with players and dancers on Rāma's birthday celebrations (I. 18. 18). The word *śailūṣa* is used in the Rāmāyaṇa in the sense of an actor (II. 30. 8). Actresses were usually society girls with low morals.

Outdoor sports formed no less an important part in the life of the people. Cities were provided with gardens and groves for diversion of citizens. Ayodhyā is described as full of parks (*udyānāmravaṇopetām*, I. 5. 12). The Rākṣasa capital, too, it appears, surpassed Aryan cities in its exuberance of lovely parks, entertainment centres and pleasure hills (V. 3. 2 ; 2. 6-13 ; 6. 36-7).

Gardens and groves were the common places of recreation for both sexes. Bevies of girls from the towns would visit these resorts for sport and good time in the evening (II. 67. 17). Parks were the busy haunts of pleasure-seekers (II. 71. 22). Bharata, on his return from Kekaya, found these places—where love-intoxicated people usually met for purposes of sport—joyless, desolate and dreary (II. 71. 25-6). Aśokāvāṭikā, the pleasure retreat of Rāvaṇa, abounding in woody tracks, was a most pleasant site, captivating to the eye as well as the mind (*netra-manaḥ-kāntam*) even for a stoic like Hanumān (V. 14).

To the palace of kings were attached parks meant for recreation, especially for the ladies of the harem. The palaces in Ayodhyā and Laṅkā were provided with *pramadavanas* (V. 41. 15) or ladies' corners as outdoor adjuncts to the apartments. At Citrakūṭa, Rāma pointed out to Sītā the captivating playgrounds of the Vidyādharis (II. 94. 12). Sītā herself was very fond of roving in woods (III. 61. 15). The vicinity of Rāma's hut at Janasthāna was a spacious playground (III. 58. 20). While sporting in the hermitage of Pañcavaṭī, she used to mimick *sārasas* to invite the birds' attention (IV. 30. 7). Rāvaṇa addressed her as a *vilāsinī* (V. 20. 18, sportive damsel).

The society of the day accorded freedom to its women for enjoying themselves out in open parks and woods in the company of their husbands. Mandodarī was Rāvaṇa's companion in sports (*krīḍā-sahāya*, VI. 111. 63). In association with her husband, and attired glamorously and garlanded, she used to visit gardens and countrysides (VI. 111. 32. 3). Rāvaṇa cajolingly invited Sītā to range with him in forests on seashore abloom with black bees (V. 20. 36 ; 24. 35-6). The spacious uplands of Mt. Mahendra were frequented by Gandharva couple engaged in drinking and dallying (VI. 67. 45).

In the cities, and on their outskirts, in the palaces and gardens were maintained pleasure houses and recreation centres for the citizens. There is mention of *ākrīḍa* (pleasure hills, V. 2. 12), *citra-gṛha* (picture galleries, V. 12. 1), *dāru-parvata* (sport hills, V. 6. 37), *divā-gṛha* (dwellings for day dalliances, V. 6. 37), *gṛhātigṛhaka* (recreation houses or clubs constructed far away from city dwellings where kings and other high officials retired when they wanted to take a pleasure jaunt, V. 12. 15), *kadalī-gṛha* (plantain houses, III. 42. 23), *kāmasya gṛhakam ramyam* (captivating structures dedicated to dalliance, V. 6. 37), *krīḍā-gṛhaka* (sport saloons,

V. 6. 37 ; 12. 13), *kūṭāgāra* (sport chambers for ladies, I. 5. 15), *latā-gṛha* (bowers, V. 12. 1), *niṣkuṭa* (pleasure groves adjoining a house, V. 12. 14), *nagaropavana* (urban villas, V. 60. 9), *puṣpa-gṛha* (arbours, V. 12. 13), *vihāra* (out-station groves, V. 60. 13) and *vardhamāna-gṛha* (big clubs, II. 17. 18 ; V. 4. 8).

Of the more grandiose amusements, hunting or *mṛgayā* was at once a royal prerogative and pastime. Rāma referred to it as a legitimate sport of kings (IV. 18. 38-40). Hunting was introduced for the recreation of *rājarṣis* (II. 49. 16). Rainy season was peculiarly exciting to hunters (II. 63. 14, 20). On leaving the frontiers of Kosala, Rāma asked with longing when he would go a-hunting again to the blossoming groves of the Sarayū (II. 49. 14). Pleading with Lakṣmaṇa on the propriety of hunting the golden deer, Rāma says that kings hunt deer with a dual purpose—for pleasure as much as for venion (incidentally obtained) (III. 43.31). It was not that Rāma was unaware or unmindful of the cruelty involved in the game. He apologetically stated that he was desirous of only a moderate amount of sport and that a relish for hunting was approved and sanctioned by tradition (II. 49. 15).

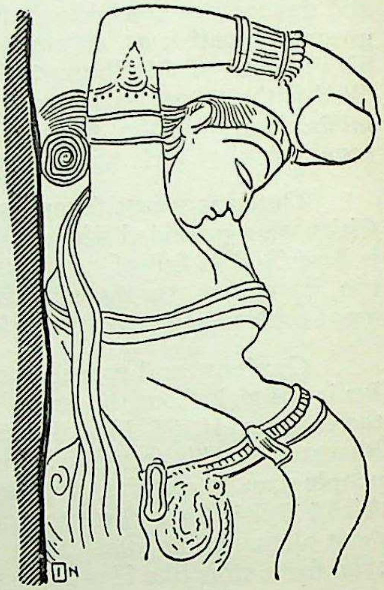

Fig. 89. *Kanduka-krīḍā*, girl playing with a ball ; Chandela, tenth century A. D. (Khajuraho).

Wild beasts, and deer, were hunted with arrows (III. 7. 20-1 ; II. 11. 22); the latter were also entrapped by hunters, being allured into a net by songs (II. 12. 77). Elephants were pierced with poisoned shafts (II. 30. 23). Daśaratha shot Andhamuni's son, mistaking him for an elephant, with a glittering, piercing missile "deadly like a serpent's venomed bite" (II. 63. 23). Elephants were also trapped into covered pits (V. 47. 20).

Ball games were among other outdoor sports (fig. 89). *Jala-krīḍā* or sporting in rivers and lakes too was popular.

Wrestling seems to have been widely current as a vigorous exercise. Warriors of old must have been trained in it as part of a regular course of physical culture. From the description of several *dvandva-yuddhas* or duels, in the Yuddha-kaṇḍa, it can be inferred that during peace-time wrestling and boxing (*bāhu-yuddha*) were cultivated as items of training as well as recreation among soldiers. Sugrīva and Rāvaṇa were adepts in the art (II. 36. 4). Vālmīki gives a detailed description of the contest between them (VI. 40). The various sleights and tricks employed by the combatants, which are current even now in our country, consisted of the following :

Maṇḍala—It is of four kinds : *cārī*, *karaṇa*, *khaṇḍa* and *mahāmaṇḍala*. Proceeding with one leg advanced is *cāri* ; with two alternately advanced it is *karaṇa* ; after the manner of *karaṇa* with some special movements it is *khaṇḍa* ; and two or three *khaṇḍas* combined constitute *mahāmaṇḍala*.

Sthāna— A particular adjustment of steps is called *sthāna*. It is of six kinds : *vaiṣṇava*, *samapāda*, *vaiśākha*, *maṇḍala*, *pratyālīḍha* and *ālīḍha*. In these the modes of pouncing of animals like lion, tiger, dog, cat, etc., is imitated.

Gomūtraka—A kind of motion resembling the flow of the cow's urine, as the name implies.

Gata-pratyāgata—Advancing and retreating.

Tiraścīna-gata—Birdwise movements.

Vakragata—Circular movements.

Parimokṣaṇam—Hastily executed retreats to make the enemy miss his aim.

Varjanam—Avoiding the onslaught of the enemy.

Paridhāvanam—Running round the enemy, eyeing him all the time, to get the opportune moment to strike him.

Abhidravaṇam—Swiftly confronting the enemy.

Āplāva—Advancing haltingly like a frog.

Avasthānam savigraham—Standing fearlessly before the enemy after having engaged him in a conflict.

Parāvṛttam—Withdrawal after defeat to a corner.

Apāvṛttam—Moving off from the side of the enemy.

Apadruta—Moving with a low posture for seizing the adversary's thighs.

Avapluta—Going for a kick.

Upanyasta—Stretching forth one's arms to seize those of the enemy.

Apanyasta—Distending the chest so that the enemy may not catch hold of the arms.

From this survey of recreations prevalent during the Rāmāyaṇa age, a number of significant conclusions can be drawn in respect of morality underlying people's zest for recreations.

Firstly, the different items of pastime are a testimony to the collective group-life led by the Aryans of the period.

Secondly, moderation was recommended in the pursuit of pleasures involving an "avoidable" loss of animal life. Rāma's gusto for hunting was tempered with an awareness of the cruelty perpetrated on innocent creatures. He took care not to indulge in this cruelty within the precincts of a hermitage (III. 7. 20-2). The moral code of the age damned excessive addiction to hunting as one of the Ten Vices for a king (II. 100. 68) and gave the ruling that those always engaged in killing animals deserved hell (IV. 17. 36). Likewise, excessive indulgence in gambling, drink, music and dancing was looked upon with disfavour by the savants of the day. Temperance was the golden rule that recommended itself to all in the sphere of material pleasures.

Thirdly, the pleasures that contributed to one's selfish or morbid gratification but were palpably deleterious to social weal could not but evoke spirited protest from intelligent public opinion. When Asamañja, the idiotic son of Sagara, began to take a weird delight in kidnapping children playing in the streets, and throwing them into the river, society could not tolerate this outrage and asserted itself in effecting his disinheritance, and banishment from the city (II. 36. 19-24).

And *lastly*, particularly noteworthy is the contrast which Vālmīki draws between the genuinely wholesome, honest and joyous recreations, on the one hand, and the dissolute and voluptuous pleasures of the flesh, on the other. The two types are well demarcated in the civilizations of Ayodhyā and Laṅkā (cf. I. 6. 6-8 ; V. 9. 29). Drink and dalliance are after all vulgar pleasures (*grāmya-sukha*, VI. 60. 19); and Vālmīki, after describing Rāvaṇa's harem in detail, deems the Rākṣasa way of living, steeped in rank carnality, as it were, utterly inconsistent with man's inherent potentialities.

CHAPTER XIX

LAND OF PLENTY

The itinerant Aryans of the Vedic age had, before the advent of the Rāmāyaṇa period, organized themselves into a stable society, thus laying foundations for a full-fledged economic life. The Rāmāyaṇa Aryans were "no longer like the warrior cultivators who battled against the black aborigines and won control over the Indus region. Manners had changed, society had become more refined and polished, learning and art had made considerable progress. Kings invited wise men to their courts, held enlightening discourses with their priests, performed elaborate sacrifices according to the rules of the age, led respectable armies to the battle-field, appointed duly qualified men to collect taxes and administer justice and discharge the duties of civilized administrators."[1]

A well-governed State was regarded as a *sine qua non* of the economic life of the country. "In an *arājaka* or anarchical State, people would not carry on their avocations in peace. Property would not be safe and there would be no honesty in the transactions between people. Wealthy people would be afraid of keeping the doors of their houses open for fear of thieves. Merchants would not travel in safety with heavy loads of merchandise. Nobody could claim anything as his own, as people would be only cheating one another in the absence of a sovereign. There would be nobody to maintain law and order and the evils would be manifold in the absence of a king who was the friend and protector of the people and the source of all justice and truth" (II. 67).

Finance in ancient India was known as *vārtā* (II. 100. 47). The term was also used as a collective name for the different occupations of the Vaiśyas, *viz*, agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade. The raising of *vārtā* to the status of a branch of learning so important as to be classed with three other branches, *viz*., *ānvīkṣikī*, *trayī* and *daṇḍanīti* (*tisraḥ vidyāḥ*) is first noticeable in the Rāmāyaṇa (II. 100. 68). This leads to the inference that, prior to the emergence of *vārtā* as a *śāstra* requiring systematic study, the occupations of agriculture, trade and cattle-rearing must have developed haphazardly; but subsequent to its realization as a specialized branch of learning, agriculture, etc., must have received a careful attention and perhaps a conscious direction.[2] The question (II. 100. 47) put by Rāma to Bharata regarding the people engaged in agriculture and other occupations and the application of *vārtā* points to this. Application of the principles of *vārtā* within his state through competent men was thus the look-out of a sovereign.

Wealth—*artha* (VI. 83. 32) or *dhana* (I. 5. 5)—signified not merely coins but a wide range of goods like grains, cattle, houses and fields (II. 33. 17-21), elephants, horses, woollens and deer-skins (II. 70. 19-21), in fact all that was of economic use to the community, which shows that even in those days *artha* had to a certain extent the same connotation that wealth has in modern economic phraseology, *viz*., "anything which has an exchange value."

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[1] R. C. Dutt : *A History of Civilization in Ancient India.*

[2] N. Law ; *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, p. 81.

The importance of wealth in the economic life of the individual and the nation was well realized, as is evident from a speech of Lakṣmaṇa (VI. 83). Labour was of two kinds : *viṣṭi* and *karmāntika*. *Viṣṭi* was unpaid labour, a tax in kind; *karmāntikas* were day labourers who were paid regular wages (II. 82. 20).

The main source of the king's income was the *bali-ṣaḍ-bhāga* (II. 75. 25) or the payment of one-sixth of the produce by the subjects. This was supplemented by tributes (*upāhāra*) received from vassal kings (I. 5. 14; II. 82. 8). Kings received royalties on mines also, as is inferable from Rāma's enquiries about the mines in Ayodhyā (II. 100. 45). Viśvāmitra's reference to the king as a *ratnahārī* (I. 53. 9) indicates a king's right to the gems (the best of everything or to a share in every kind of profit) in the land. Kings were expected to be astute in both "earning" wealth and of the right methods of spending it (II. 1. 26). Daśaratha's ministers are said to be very vigilant in replenishing the treasury (I. 7. 13).

Kings spent of their wealth liberally on sacrifices and other religious rites, in feeding Brāhmaṇas and guests, in maintaining their families and friends, and in strengthening the army (II. 100. 55). Existence of *tīrthas* (II. 100. 36), that is higher officials forming departmental heads of the State, presupposes a machinery dealing with the collection of revenue and its expenditure on public welfare.

Kṛṣi (II. 67. 18) or agriculture was the major industry of the country. This is evident from the fact that Vaiśvas, who assembled after the death of Daśaratha, are referred to as *kṛṣi-gorakṣya-jīvinaḥ, i e.,* subsisting on agriculture and cattle-rearing (II. 67. 18). Prosperity of Kosala consisted in fields, groves, tanks and pastoral villages (II. 50. 8-11); and the wealth or property of citizens (of Ayodhyā) is summed up as gardens, agricultural fields, houses, money and grains (II. 33. 17-8). The supreme importance of agriculture, trade and cattle-rearing in national economy is recognized by Rāma when he declares *vārtā* to be the bedrock of material prosperity of a country (II. 100. 47).

Agriculture was patronized by the State. It was a subject included among its eightfold administrative items (*aṣṭavarga*, II. 100. 68). The king was specially enjoined to look after the welfare of those engaged in agriculture and cattle-rearing, to relieve their distress, and secure their property (II. 100. 47-8). The State maintained its own granary called *dhānyakośa* (II. 36. 7).

During the reigns of Daśaratha and Rāma, agriculture in India seems to have made unusual progress. The kingdom (of Kosala) abounded in corn, wealth and cow, and was dotted with tanks, gardens and mango-groves (II. 49). Provinces overflowed with food, milk and milk products (III. 16. 7). The flourishing and smiling country of the Vatsas is depicted as crowned with goodly, timely crops (II. 52. 101). Māgadhī flowed through fertile, smiling fields (I. 32. 10). Laṅkā had an equable climate, swept as it was by sea breezes, and was very fertile as it had plentiful rainfall too (V. 3. 3; 2. 12-4). The south sea-coast of India abounded in woods and groves of excellent and odorous *takkola* fruits, blossoms of *tamāla* and thickets of black pepper (III. 35. 23).

The secret of this agricultural prosperity of Kosala lay in the just and equitable administration of the country carried on by the righteous Ikṣvāku princes. This guaranteed peasantry freedom from wild beasts and snakes, thieves, diseases or calamities, in fact freedom from every kind of fear (*hiṁsābhiḥ abhivarjitaḥ*, II. 100. 44). In an anarchical State, agricultural distress was an invariable nightmare, since husbandmen would not like to sow seed because of the uncertainty of (reaping) a harvest (II. 67. 9-10).

At the end of autumn, when the earth was splendidly covered with crops

(III. 16. 5), all countryside, with its needs of foodstuffs fully met, presented a panoramic sight of plenty and prosperity (III. 16. 16-7). Descriptions of the country, through which Rāma drove on his way to the forest, bear testimony to the affluence the people enjoyed (II. 49).

Agricultural villages were known as *grāmas* (II. 57. 4), while the larger provincial towns—the big markets for agricultural produce—were known as *nagaras*. Villagefolk had their fields on the outskirts of their village (II. 1. 46). Rāma, on his way to the forest, is said to have passed through villages with fields ploughed and ready for receiving the seed (*grāmān vikṛṣṭa-sīmāntān*, II. 49. 3). Proximity of the agricultural *grāmas* to the commercial *nagaras* is frequently indicated. Sumantra returning to Ayodhyā, after leaving Rāma in the forest, passed through full many a *grāma* and *nagara* (II. 57. 4). Vicinity of a town must have led to intensive cultivation and stimulated agriculture. It had for the peasant a clear economic advantage in so far as he had a ready market for all the produce of his land in the nearby towns.

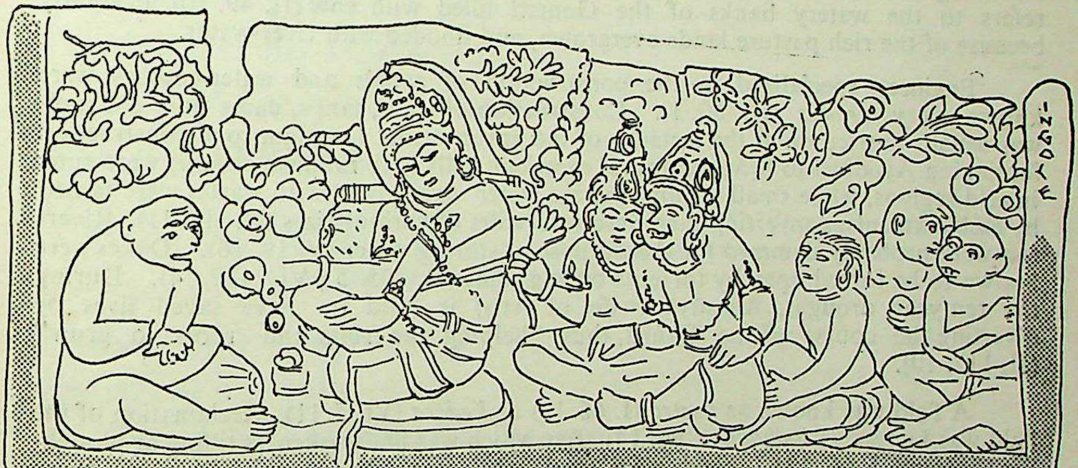

Fig. 90. Hanumān, back from Laṅkā, narrates his experience to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A. D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The fact that the six pests of agriculture (*himsāḥ*, II. 100. 44) are referred to and that the king is warned in advance to have a clear idea of the measures for preventing them indicates that the possibility of famine was not altogether ruled out. The Rāmāyaṇa actually contains descriptions of famines occurring in pre-Rāma periods, although it declares time and again that during the reign of Rāma the people were free from this scourge (I. 1. 90). Famines were mainly caused by droughts, which affected the crops. During the reign of Daśaratha, a "terrible and dreadful drought," occurred in the neighbouring kingdom of Romapāda. It is said that when Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, the young celibate hermit, entered the kingdom, Indra poured forth plenty of showers, thus enlivening the hearts of the people (I. 9-10). Sage Atri narrated to Rāma how a particular drought often had lasted ten years, as a consequence of which the whole earth was scorched (II. 117. 9). The Uttarakāṇḍa (84. 4-6) again describes the occurrence of a great drought as a result of which whole land had become barren and dry with forests rotted, pools, tanks, lakes, dried up, and all living things withered, decayed.

That seasonal rainfall primarily served the purpose of irrigation is evident from the copious similes and imageries referring to the husbandman's expectation of rain (II. 112. 12; 32. 13). However, as a precaution against drought and famine, the importance of offering artificial irrigational facilities to the peasants was well recognized by the rulers. During the Rāmāyaṇa period too, there must have been two kinds of crops, similar to those of our day, the dry variety depending on rain (IV. 14. 16; VI. 33. 34), the wet one on extensive irrigational channels and rivers (II. 100. 45). Agricultural fields irrigated by rivers were known as *nadī-mātṛka* or *adeva-mātṛka*, and those depending on rains for cultivation were known as *deva-mātṛka*. The fields of Kosala are termed as *adeva-mātṛka*, *i.e.*, not depending on rain for growing foodstuffs (II. 100. 45). This clearly indicates that there was provision of regular irrigational facilities to the agriculturist.

The chief means of irrigation were tanks, lakes, wells and rivers. Kosala abounded in tanks constructed for prosperity (of agriculture) (II. 100. 43). It was realized that an arid field, by its propinquity to a well-watered field, could reap the advantage of moisture, resulting from the fact of its contiguity (VI. 5. 11). Irrigation by the natural process of enundation (*i.e.*, rivers depositing sediment after floods and thus fertilizing the soil) must have been ordinarily availed of (II. 20. 49). The Rāmāyaṇa refers to the watery banks of the Gomatī filled with cow (II. 49. 10), evidently because of the rich pasture lands overgrown, and flooded with river-water.

Engineers specialized in the construction of canals and water-courses were known as *yantrakas* (II. 80. 1). Construction of wells, tanks, dams and channels was usually carried on at the instance of the government. During a road-construction for linking Ayodhyā to Śṛṅgaverapura, excellent wells with railings (*vedikā*) were sunk in arid regions, while small streams (whose water overflowed with waste) were tamed by embankments, converting them into reservoirs of various sizes (II. 80. 11). Rivers too were probably dammed for the purpose of storing water (V. 19. 16). Dykes were known to be forced open by torrents during rains (II. 105. 5 ; VI. 128. 4). During the ten-year drought, Anasūyā (wife of Atri) is said to have saved lives by diverting the course of the Gaṅgā, thus "helping the fruits and roots to grow" (II. 117. 10).

A field was known as *kṣetra* (I. 66. 13) or *kedāra* (VI. 5. 11). Reclamation of the field was known as *śodhana* (I. 66. 14) after which was undertaken its tilling or ploughing (*karṣaṇa*, I. 66. 13). Fields were, even as it is done now, furrowed with a plough drawn by a pair of oxen who were naturally worked hard under the tropical sun (II. 74. 23). There were two harvests every year. The tilled soil or furrow was known as *sītā*. In the *hemanta*, the tilled soil, browned by the sun's rays, assumed the hue of moonlight obscured by mist (II. 16. 14).

Corn sown in a fertile field in the rainy season was sure to blossom to maturity (IV. 7. 20). Seeds, put hard by the wind and the sun, are described as being refreshed during rains (V. 29. 6). Only well-timed rain (*suvarṣa*) was conducive to excellent cultivation (or, according to another reading, three consecutive showers—*trivarṣa*—were regarded as favourable to crops, II. 43. 16). For corn to ripen requires assistance of time (IV. 49. 27). Showers of rain were most welcome when the corn was halfway towards ripening (V. 40. 2).

A paddy-field was known as *kalama-kṣetra* (IV. 14. 16). Paddy was sown in summer or early rains; profuse showers were most favourable for rice-fields to bring forth rich yield. In the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, there is a reference to a *kalama-kṣetra*, during rains, with the sprouts shooting forth (IV. 14. 16). Paddy was of two kinds: *śiśira* or the autumn crop harvested about October (IV. 30 53), and *hemanta* or the winter crop harvested about January (III. 16. 17). Rāma, in his description of autumn and winter, refers to ripe sprouts in the paddy-fields (IV. 30. 47,) and to the earth shining with golden harvests (III. 16. 5). Barley (*yava*) and wheat (*godhūma*) were evidently winter crops.

The calamities faced or suffered by the farmers are referred to by Rāma as *hiṁsās* (II. 100. 44), explained and enumerated by the commentator as *ṣaḍ ītayaḥ*—drought, floods, rats, birds, locusts, and invasion by enemy kings.

An unproductive barren land was known as *iriṇa* (I. 55. 24). This barrenness of the earth was believed to be due to its share of *brahma-hatyā* in the kingdom (VII. 86. 14).

Some of the corns and cereals mentioned in the epic are :

Bhadra (II. 32. 20)—A variety of grain.

Caṇaka (VII. 91. 20)—Gram.

Dhānya (III. 35. 25)—Apparently included food-grains.

Godhūma (III. 16. 16)—Wheat.

Ikṣu (I. 5. 17)—Sugarcane.[1]

Kulittha (VII. 91. 20)—Dolichos Uniflorus.

Marīca (III. 35. 23)—A variety of spices.

Māṣa (VII. 91. 20)—Beans.

Śāli (I. 5. 17)—A superior variety of rice. *Taṇḍula* (I. 5. 17) was husked paddy or rice. At VII. 91. 19, a fine variety of rice, which remains always whole and unbroken, is mentioned.

Tila (VII. 91. 19)—Sesamum.

Yava (III. 16. 16)—Barley.

The following were some of the implements employed by agriculturists :

Dātra (II. 80. 7)—Sickle.

Hala (I. 39. 19)—Ploughshare.

Kalaśa (II. 63. 38)—Water-pot.

Kaṭhinakāja (II. 55. 17)—Iron-pick and leather-box.

Khanitra (I. 40. 27; II. 31. 25)—Spade.

Kṣura (II. 12. 10)—Iron blade.

Kuddāla (II. 32. 29)—Hoe.

Kumbha (II. 64. 15)—Water jar.

Lāṅgala (I. 40. 27)—Plough-shaped beam.

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[1] Probably the Ikṣvākus were the first planters and owed their family-name to *Ikṣu* or sugarcane "whose quality they had come to control through experiments" (J. C. Ray : *Food and Drink in Ancient India*, 'Man in India,' vol. xiii, p. 225).

Paraśu (II. 32. 32) or *Kuṭhāra* (II. 80. 7)—Axe.

Piṭaka (II. 31. 25)—Basket.

Phāla (II. 32. 29)—Coulter.

Śūla (I. 39. 19)—Pike.

Taṅka (II. 80. 7)—Hatchet.

In the Rāmāyaṇa age, cultivation had advanced far beyond the primitive state of the *Ṛgveda*. Though references to the actual method(s) of cultivating various corns and cereals are meagre in the epic, the highly developed art of cooking all along testifies to the cultivation of all possible varieties of foodstuffs. This agricultural prosperity of the country, as described above, was an inevitable corollary of advance in cultivation. When Pārvatī cursed the earth to be multi-formed (*naikarūpā*, I. 36. 23), it was a blessing in disguise, in fact stressing the multi-productive capacity of the earth—the various corns and cereals that could be cultivated on the earth and the different herbs and roots that could be obtained from it (VII. 59A. 8). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, during Vṛtra's reign, the earth is described as bountiful—*sarva-kāma-dughā* (VII. 84. 7)—which, again, indicates a developed state of agriculture.

Among the auxiliaries of agriculture, horticulture was developed to admirable extent. Gardens and orchards were attached to palaces as well as to private houses. Rāma's exile and Daśaratha's death, calamities coming together had taken away the enthusiasm of the citizens of Ayodhyā from the upkeep of their gardens for quite a time (II. 67. 12). Ayodhyā contained many large public parks for sport d' elite. Madhuvana was the favourite orchard of Sugrīva carefully looked after by him (V. 61-2). Hanumān's description of the Aśoka-grove in Laṅkā gives an idea of the advanced state of horticulture abroad (V. 6). Gardens are spoken of as containing trees bearing fruits and flowers of all seasons (VI. 128. 102; 27. 36, 34). So, fruit culture must have been considerably developed. The art of transplantation was certainly known. Bharata's workmen grew trees where there had been none previously on the intended royal route from Ayodhyā to Citrakūṭa. The variety of fruit trees, of timber and of flower plants—cultivated during the period—is so numerous that a study of them from botanical and historical points of view would go a long way towards a proper evaluation of our ancient plant lore.[1]

Cattle-rearing and agriculture were sister occupations in rural areas. Pastoral villages, known as *ghoṣas* (II. 83. 15), were probably in close proximity to the *grāmas* or agricultural villages. (*Grāma-ghoṣa*, VI. 83. 15, is another term frequently met with in the epic.) But cattle-rearing was not confined to rural areas only. Even cities, like Ayodhyā, had abundant cows (I. 5. 13). The day Rāma departed for the forest, cows in Ayodhyā had refused to suckle their calves (II. 41. 9).

That the cattle wealth of the country was substantial is evident from references to the numerous occasions when myriads of cows were given away as gifts to suppliants (I. 14. 50 ; 18. 20 ; 72. 21). Rāma, on his was to the forest, saw the banks of the Tamasā (II. 46. 17) and the Gomatī (II. 49. 10) filled with cow. Kings were always advised to keep amply provided with cows (II. 100. 50). The kingdom of Kosala was especially rich in cattle wealth (*paśumān*, II. 100. 44). There are frequent references to the existence of lakhs and crores of cows (I. 53. 9). The king himself was a large owner and breeder of cattle.

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[1] See Sibdas Chaudhari : *Concordance of the Fauna in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Indian Historical Quarterly*, xxviii, 2 to 30).

Cow-stall was known as *pratyāgāra* (II. 40. 43). Herds of cows were called *go-kula* (II. 46. 17), *go-yuta* (II. 49. 10) or *go-vraja* (II. 32. 38). The cowherd or keeper of cows was called *go-pāla* (II. 67. 29) ; a meadow—*śādvala* (III. 16. 20). At Bharadvāja's hermitage, the soldiers of Bharata saw plots of tender grass all around, coloured like blue lapises, to serve as pastures for the cattle (II. 91. 79).

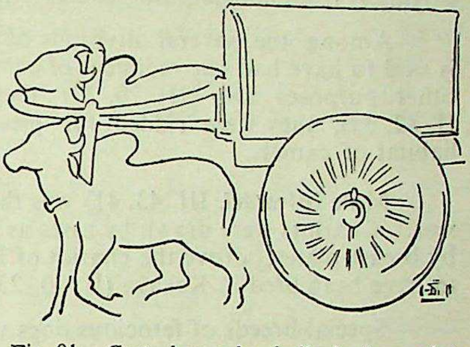

Fig. 91. Cart drawn by bullocks (*go-ratha*) ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

While bullocks were required for ploughing (II. 74. 23), riding (II. 70. 29) and drawing the country carts (*go-rathas*, II. 83. 16 ; fig. 91), cows supplied milk, *ghee* and curd for domestic and religious use (I. 53. 13). The dung of cattle was used for fuel (II. 91. 7). Rāma realized the importance of cow for the prosperity of a country when he advised Bharata to be constantly alive to the cowherd's welfare (II. 100. 47).

The breeding of cattle, no less than their rearing, engaged equal attention of the agriculturists. Cattle-breeding was done on an extensive scale throughout the kingdom. There are frequent references to herds of cows being led by *go-vṛṣas* or breeding bulls (IV. 30. 38 ; 23. 26 ; II. 114. 9). Evidently, only selected bulls were kept with the herds grazing along river-banks.

Cattle-lifting, which was a common Vedic Kṣatriya practice, seems to have continued during the Rāmāyaṇa age too, as is evidenced by the legend of Viśvāmitra's attempt at taking away the cattle of Vasiṣṭha's *āśrama* by force. But he was attacked by mercenary Śaka, Yavana, Pahlava and other barbarians, probably employed by the hermitage, and was forced to flee the kingdom (I. 54).

Next to cow and ox, horse was the most important domestic animal and played a vital part in the country's economy. Breeding of good horses was a matter deserving of special care. The steeds of Rāma were fleet horses of famous breeds (II. 45. 14). Rāma had spotted from a distance the graceful, well-bred horses of his father's (II. 97. 24) on seeing Bharata and party advancing towards them.

Special breeds of horses must have been bred for specific purposes. War horses used for cavalry had to be specially trained (II. 83. 5). Horse-breaking was an art with which princes like Rāma were conversant (II. 1. 28). Horses for war-chariots (*sāṅgrāmika-haya*, VI. 43. 43) had to be trained to make them withstand the din and clatter of the battle-field and execute desired movements. Of special note is Indrajit's war-chariot whose *vidheyāśvas* (VI. 82. 10) with intelligent movements in the battle-field after the death of their driver evoked admiration even from the enemy (VI. 90. 28-9). Rāvaṇa's chariot was drawn by well-broken horses (VI. 11. 3). Horses drawing war-chariots were well decked with gold trappings provided with armoury (III. 22. 22). Horses of pleasure-car (V. 6. 4-5), royal State chariot (II. 26. 15 ; 97. 24) and ordinary riding chariot (II. 39. 10)—each breed was trained differently. Hill-bred horses (*parvatīya turaṅgama*, II. 71. 14)—fast and sure-footed—were used for transport on uneven hilly tracks. These were used by Bharata when hurrying home from Kekaya on Daśaratha's death. Speed was the most coveted quality in horses (II. 45. 14). Horses used by couriers for summing Bharata from Kekaya must have been extraordinary (*sammata*, II. 68. 10).

Horse-breeding must have been carried out in certain provinces (*deśajāta* and *kulaja*, I. 53. 19), as the most famous breeds of the day—the Kāmboja (Tartary breed), the Bālhīka (Bactria breed), the Nadīja (Scinde breed) and the Vanāyu (Arab breed) (I. 6. 22)—indicate. These breeds must have been probably imported originally from neighbouring countries, and then broken locally.

Among the several divisions of the army, camels too comprised one. Rāvaṇa is said to have had one regiment of camels (VI. 53. 5). Camels were employed for other purposes also (II. 70. 29) : they were also yoked to chariots (*uṣṭra-rathas*, II. 82. 32), they were ridden for pleasure and trade. There is no reference to the habitat of camels.

Mule (*aśvatarī*, III. 43. 41) was the beast of burden in times both of peace and war. Chariots were drawn by asses as well (VI. 51. 26 ; III. 35. 6). Asses, protected by breast-plates, drove the chariot of Rāvaṇa (III. 64. 46). Fast footed asses seem to have been bred in Kekaya (II. 70. 23).

Special breeds of ferocious dogs were bred in Kekaya. They were brought up in the inner apartments, large of body, tigers-like in prowess, with teeth as weapons (II. 70. 20). Considered unclean and unfit to enter into houses and sacrificial grounds (VII. 18. 6), they were put to use only in hunting (III. 55. 5).

Elephants were largely requisitioned both for civil and military purposes, and on considerations of majesty, beauty and pedigree they were trained (V. 6. 32). Kings kept huge forest reserves for breeding elephants. Rāma asked Bharata specifically to protect these reserves (II. 100. 50).

Special tricks were employed for catching wild elephants and taming them. They were caught with trained elephants as decoy, were broken, and tamed by those already tamed and trained (III. 56. 31 ; VI. 16. 6-8). They were also caught in pits covered with grass (V. 47. 20) into which they were driven with torches and fire-brands (II. 21. 54 ; VI. 13. 19; 24. 38). They were also harassed by goads and *tomaras* (II. 74. 35). The elephant-drivers were called *mahāmātras* (V. 6. 5). Captured the elephants were tied with huge waist-bands (V. 1. 64). Sītā in the Aśokavāṭikā is compared to a captured she-elephant—separated from her mate, tied to a post, sighing deeply and in great distress (V. 19. 18).

The slopes of the Himālaya and Vindhya mountains were reputed for the finest breeds of elephants (I. 6. 23). They were of huge size and always in rut. The breeds from Airāvata and Indraśira Hills were also noted for their beauty (II. 70. 23). The famous breeds of the day were Airāvatakula, Mahāpadmakula, Añjanakula and Vāmanakula (I. 6. 24). Elephants of various species could be seen in Rāvaṇa's palace (V. 9. 5). Elephants were decked with ornaments (I. 53. 17-8). Age of 60 (*ṣaṣṭihāyanāḥ*, II. 67. 20) enhanced their vintage-value.

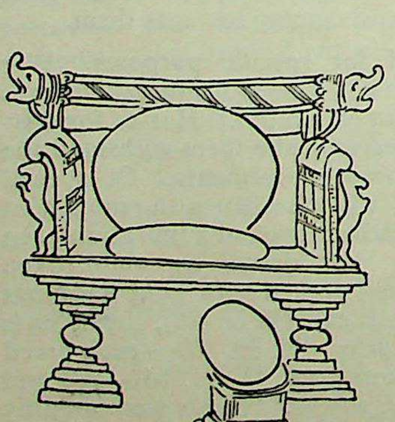

Fig. 92. A throne; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Various industries were cultivated to turn to economic use the produce from different animals, domesticated or otherwise. Dairy-farming was widespread as an indigenous industry because of the almost universal prevalence of cattle-rearing. Villages of milkmen, the *ghoṣas*, were in a flourishing condition. Lakṣmaṇa, in describing the setting in of the *hemants*, depicts the surrounding countryside as having plenty of milk and its produces (III. 16. 7).

The high value set upon the tusks of elephants, known as *dānta* (II. 10. 14-5) or ivory, gave rise to the ivory industry. Various articles of furniture like seats, cots, chariots, thrones (fig. 92), *etc.*, and miscellaneous architectural structures were inlaid with artistic ivory work and were in high demand by the aristrocracy. The palace of Kaikeyī was furnished with ivory daises and seats (II. 10. 14-5). The edifices in Laṅkā had beautiful pillars of ivory and silver, shaded with golden nets (III. 55. 8, 10). Rāvaṇa's chariot contained effigies of ivory (V. 6. 6). Evidently, a sizeable number of skilled artisans must have been employed in the industry.

Curing and tanning of leather was well-known. It is legitimate to assume from the frequent mention of tiger skins used in royal paraphernalia, and deer skins used as clothing by ascetics, that taxidermy must have been fairly developed. Tiger skins (*vyāghra-carma*, II. 3. 11), lion skins (*siṁha-tanu*, V. 6. 6) and deer skins (*ajina*, II. 99. 26) were used as bedspreads, and on chariots (V. 6. 6) and thrones (II. 88 4 ; 15. 5 ; 3. 11). Deer skins were largely used by ascetics and householders during religious ceremonies (III. 43. 20). Exquisiteness, golden hue and comfortable touch were the qualities prized in deer skins (III. 43. 35-6). The varieties of deer skins in use were *kadalī*, *priyakī*, *praveṇī* and *āvikī* (III. 43. 36). Goat skins were called *ajāvika* (VII. 39. 10). Chowries, used as symbols of royalty and as fly-whisks, were made from the hair of the *cāmara* deer (*cāmara-vyajana*, II. 3. 11 or *vāla-vyajana*, II. 91. 39). Musk (*kastūrī*) was obtained from the navel of the roaming deer. *Ārṣabha-carma* or bull-hide was largely in use for various purposes. Bull-hide bucklers were used by Rākṣasas (VI. 54. 30) and Vidyādharas (V. 1. 24). In Laṅkā, Rākṣasa ascetics wore bull-hide (V. 4. 15). Shields made from leather were used by the attendants of Rāvaṇa (VI. 11. 5).

The produce of forests too was usefully employed. Forests were known as *araṇyas* (II. 34. 28), *vanas* (II. 34. 55) or *kānanas* (II. 34. 56). In the time of Vālmīki, dense forests covered a greater part of southern India. Forests were State property and, thus, an economic asset to the community. They served as natural pastures for cattle (III. 16. 20 ; II. 91. 79), and were utilized as burial places[1] and cremation grounds also.[2] They were a perennial source of fuel to the community. There are numerous references to the hewing of wood from the trees with an axe (II. 8. 30 ; 20. 32 ; 72. 22). The woodmen earning their livelihood from the forest were known as *vanajīvana* (II. 8. 30) or *vanopajīvana* (II. 54. 7). Forest trees provided timber for construction of houses, chariots, furniture, sacrificial implements and the like. Forests also supplied material for building canoes (II. 55. 14-5). Of trees particularly valued for their wood, the *sāla* (II. 72. 22), the *aūdumbara* (I. 4. 25), the *veṇu* (II. 83. 6), the *tāla* (IV. 31. 14) and the *devadāru* (VII. 42. 3) find mention again and again.

Among other forest products were *āraṇyakam madhu* (wild honey, II. 36. 6), *niryāsa* (odorous gums, III. 20. 23) and *nyagrodha kṣīra* (milk from the Indian fig tree utilized for matting the ascetics' locks of hair, II. 52. 68). The wildly growing trees of Malaya produced spices like black pepper (*marīca*, III. 35. 23 or *pippalī*, III. 11. 49) and fruits like *takkola* (III. 35. 22). The coastal regions abounded in coconuts (*nārikela*, V. 1. 200), palms (*tamāla*, III. 35. 23) and dates (*kharjūra*, III. 15. 16). The forests also supplied much of the raw materials for cosmetics used by the city dwellers. Sandal (*candana*), which formed the principal ingredient in perfumes, is frequently mentioned (VII. 42. 2). There were forests of sandal on the islands of the Tāmraparṇī river. *Kesara* (VII. 42. 5) and *aguru* (VII. 42. 2) were the other varieties of perfume commonly used.

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[1] As in the case of Kabandha III. 4. 22-3.

[2] As in the case of Vālī IV. 25. 37.

Bark of trees supplied clothing material to the ascetics (II. 99. 26). From the fact that royal furniture was very often spread over with coverings of indigenous grass (*kuśāntardhānadatteṣu āsaneṣu*, VII. 1. 15), it may be surmised that reed-weaving was fairly developed, as an industry.

The epic contains references to yet another aspect of the economic life of the period—mining and metallurgy. Rāma refers to the existence of extensive mines in Ayodhyā which were called *khanis* (II. 100. 45). There are also frequent allusions to minerals (*dhātus*) mostly found in big mountain ranges like the Himālayas (I. 35. 13) and the Vindhyas (III. 15. 15). The mountain from which Hanumān leaped over to Laṅkā was embellished with natural and mixed metals (V. 1. 5). Minerals found in mountains were of mixed and variegated colours—silvery, blood-red, yellow, white, mercury-white, dark-blue, black and pale (II. 94. 5-6).

Some specific rocks of mineral value are also alluded to. The term *śilā* (IV. 27. 8 ; VI. 97. 15) originally stood for all simple rocks of granite and sandstone. Crystalline rocks were called *sphaṭika* (VI. 11. 14). Mineral ores containing pigments (V. 1. 16) were also worked us as there was a great demand for *manaśśilā* and *gairika*. *Manaśśilā* (II. 95A. 18) was a kind of yellowish-red arsenic found on the Mahendra Hill. *Gairika* (V. 1. 61) was a natural product, a kind of coloured chalk for drawing ornamental figures (*patrarekhā*, IV. 30. 55). *Kālāguru* (V. 1. 170) was a kind of agallochum.

Minerals were also quarried from beds of rivers. Gold dust so obtained was knows as *jāmbūnada* (I. 14. 54). The Rāmāyaṇa refers to mountain streams mixed with minerals and red chalk (V. 1. 61), and to showers of melted coppers and other metals whisked down by the winds (IV. 23. 20).

Smelting of ores and metals, and manufacture of alloyed metals must have common. Khara speaks of brass looking like gold but at first sight betraying its baseness when heated in fire (III. 29. 20). Gold was divested of its impurities by melting in fire and letting the alloys disintegrate (IV. 24. 18). Molten gold is frequently referred to in describing an ideal complexion (I. 37. 18) and composition of ornaments (IV. 3. 18). Mention of alloys like brass (III. 29. 20) and bell-metal (IV. 50. 34) vessels postulates use of zinc and tin in their manufacture. Smelting of iron ore for steel manufacture can be clearly inferred. The reference to *sūcī* (III. 47. 41) or needle presupposes manufacture of steel and steel instruments. The *kṣura* (III. 47. 41) or razor, with a very sharp edge, must have been made of tempered steel.

Whether alchemy was known in the period is not certain. References are given to this process in the 67th canto of the Bālakāṇḍa where the origin of metals is discussed; but some scholars consider it a later addition.

From a survey of the Rāmāyaṇa, the following illustrative enumeration may give some idea of the objects advance in minerology :

Ayas (III. 47. 44; II. 40. 23) or *Kālāyasa* (V. 41. 12)—Steel.

Brass alluded to at III. 29. 20.

Kālāyasa—Blue steel.

Karṣṇāyasa (I. 37. 19) or *Loha* (III. 47. 46)—Wrought iron.

Kāṁsya (IV. 50. 34)—Bell-metal.

Rajata (I. 14. 51 ; II. 32. 14) or *Hiraṇya* (I. 53. 21 ; 37. 19)—Silver. Sugrīva speaks of silver mines in the land of the Kośakaras (IV. 40. 23).

Suvarṇa (I. 14. 51 ; II. 32. 14) or *Kāñcana* (I. 37. 19) or *Jātarupa* (I. 37. 22) or *Jāmbūnada* (I. 14. 54) or *Mahārajata* (V. 10. 7) or *Hema* (IV. 50. 34)—Gold.

Sīsa (I. 37. 20)—Lead.

Tāmra (IV. 23. 20 ; I. 37. 19)—Copper.

Trapu (I. 37. 20)—Tin.

Extensive use of metals indicates development of metallurgical industries. Gold and silver were employed in the manufacture of ornaments and vessels and for prestige splendour. Zinc and tin (*trapu*) were used in the manufacture of brass and bell-metal (*kāṁsya*). Steel (*ayas* or *kālāyasa*) was used for bolts (*argala*, I. 6. 28), for arrow-heads (V. 46. 22) and for swords and *paṭṭiśas* (V. 41. 12) or broad swords. Manufacture of armour must have been a major industry in those embattled times. Armour, mace and other weapons were made of blue steel (*kālāyasa*, VI. 3. 13) as distinguished from simple wrought iron (*kārṣṇāyasa* or *loha*). The sharpness of sword and arrow was remarkable (I. 54. 22). Steel blades of warriors are described as "bright and glistening." The skill required in the manufacture of myriad-shaped arrows had reached extraordinary perfection, as there are references to arrows of countless shapes. Artistic sense displayed itself even in the manufacture of rugged arms like shafts, bows and scimitars decked with gold (II. 31. 30 ; VI. 45. 23 ; V. 47. 2 ; III. 64. 45). Armour for horses and elephants (VI. 75. 9) indicates level of development achieved in iron processing.

Manufacture of steel appliances too was very much in vogue. This is evidenced by references to *yantrāyudha* (I. 5. 10), *iṣupalayantra* (VI. 3. 12), *yantras* for working drawbridges (VI. 3. 16) and cranes for lifting huge rocks (VI. 22. 56 ; II. 77. 9). Widespread use of machinery and metal tools in fortifications and defences (I. 5. 10 ; VI. 3. 23) indicates the existence of such industries as machine and tool manufacturing.

In a society where both men and women wear ornaments, it is quite natural that crafts of jeweller (*maṇikāra*) and goldsmith (*sauvarṇika*) should prosper. Ornaments of gold and precious stones of varied designs are a proof of fine filigree work. Precious pearls were obtained from sea-beds (I. 3. 8 ; II. 81. 16). Divers in pearl fisheries and coral reefs must have existed. Rāvaṇa, on his way from Laṅkā to Mārīca's, seeing oysters being sun-dried on the coast (III. 35. 23), proves pearl-fishing as an art and industry. Fishing for conchs (*śaṅkhamuktā*, III. 43. 29) and corals (*pravāla*, III. 35. 24) was also common.

The innumerable references to the use of crystal glass (*sphaṭika*) or quartz in the construction of palatial structures (II. 17. 4 ; III. 55. 8) points to the existence of glass factories and glass blowers.

Besides, several useful arts and crafts were pursued and skilful artisans followed their respective (specialized) callings. There were sculptors and stone-masons working with the mason's chisel (*taṅka*, II. 80. 7). Breaking of rocks by heat must have been familiar (V. 1. 20). Construction of many-storeyed houses, mansions, palaces, temples and forts require the services of skilled architects. Another class of artisans must have been employed in the manufacture of the instruments of music, for that was a commonly cultivated art.

No less advancement appears to have been made in textile manufacture. Skilled weavers were called *sūtra-karma-viśārada* (II. 80. 1), while tailors were known as *tunnavāya* (II. 83. 15). Various kinds of fibres were manufactured into clothes. Woollen industry must have been in a flourishing state. Cloth made from the hair of ram was known as *aurṇa* (VI. 75. 9). Sheep's wool was called *āvika*

(VI. 75. 9). Blanket-makers (*kambala-kārakāḥ*, II. 83. 14), as a guild, followed Bharata to bring back Rāma from Citrakūṭa.

Dyeing as a profession must have existed. Dyers were called *rajakas* (II. 83. 15). There are several references to dyed clothes. Colour of cloth was called *varṇa* (V. 15. 48). Favourite colours being yellow (*pīta*, IV. 1. 21), greenish yellow (*nīla-pīta*, IV. 1. 8), red (*rakta*, VI. 40. 6), white (*śukla*, IV. 30. 46), blue (*nīla*, VII. 26. 18), green (*śukaprabha*, VI. 28. 24) and orange (*kāṣāya*, III. 46. 3). Lac-dye—*kṛmirāga* (IV. 23. 14) or *lākṣārāga* (IV. 28. 24)—was used for dyeing purposes.

Carpet-wearing was also prevalent. Carpets made of the fleece of the elephant with designs worked on them are mentioned (III. 75. 20).

Trade and commerce were brisk. Traders were mainly Vaiśyas known as *vaṇiks* (II. 67. 22). Being chief tax-payers, they deserved special attention and protection form the king. The chief cities of the period blossomed out as commercial centres thronged by prosperous traders, merchants and artisans—Ayodhyā foremost among them. Daśaratha proposed that opulent merchants from the city should join the fourfold force accompanying Rāma to the forest (II. 36. 3). Main roads leading from the palace were lined with shops dealing costly merchandise (II. 17. [illegible]-5). Loaded with merchandise, merchants of Ayodhyā used to travel far and wide (II. 67. 22) in search of new opportunities. Merchants were an indispensable appendage to the armies for running the commissariat department. Traders and artisans of all description accompanied Bharata's army to Citrakūṭa (II. 83).

Inland trade was prosperous. This they did in companies (*sārtha*, III. 60. 34), for mutual protection from robbers and beasts (II. 60. 34). The responsibility of keeping safe national highways and trade-routes developed on the State. This is clearly inferred from what the king-makers (*rāja-kartāraḥ*) stated to Vasiṣtha after the death of Daśaratha : 'merchants would not dare to travel far with merchandise in the absence of a king in their country' (II. 67. 22). The king provided conditions of internal security so that prosperous people lived without any apprehension of robbery and the agriculturists and cowherds slept with doors open (II. 67.18).

Shops, where the merchants regularly sold their wares, were called *āpaṇa* (II. 57. 15). The commodity on sale was known as *vikraya* (I. 61. 21), the price as *mūlya* (I. 61. 15), the articles of merchandise as *paṇya* (II. 67. 22). These included : *candana*, *aguru*, *gandha*, *kṣauma*, *kauśeya*, *ambara*, *muktā* (bored and unbored), *sphaṭika* (II. 17. 3-4) and *mālā* (II. 71. 41). Sale of lac, honey, meat and poison was prohibited by and for the Aryans (II. 75. 38). Profits from trade were known as *paṇya-phala* (I. 1. 100).

Commercial intercourse might have existed with foreign countries though there is paucity of details on this score. Traders must have flocked from distant countries to benefit from the security and facilities afforded by the Indian cities. The Rāmāyaṇa mentions the facts that Ayodhyā was inhabited by traders hailing from different countries with merchandise (I. 5. 14).

The Rāmāyaṇa lends some weight to the theory of India's ancient maritime trade. There is enough "sea-scape" in it to show that no poet who did not know the ocean could write as Vālmīki does. Such observations in the text as "the rivers empty themselves in the ocean which is the lord of waters" (I. 17. 27) ; "the sea heaves in the full moonlight with roaring breakers" (II. 5. 17 ; 17. 22 ; V. 5. 2) go to show that the Aryans of the age had knowledge of some of the features pertaining to the sea. The frequency with which the ocean appears in continued metaphors in the Rāmāyaṇa cannot but point to Vālmīki's familiarity with oceanography (II. 59. 28-31 ; III. 21. 12 ; VI. 7. 20). Guha's preparation for a naval fight indicates a thorough knowledge, and universal use, of waterways (II. 84. 8).

The epic mentions merchants who trafficked beyond the sea and were in the habit of bringing presents of gems to the king of Ayodhyā (II. 82. 8). Vālmīki was aware of the existence of large trading ships with sails which were often heavily loaded with merchandise. *Mahā-nau*, or the ocean-going vessels, used to sail in mid-ocean on navigation routes called *nau-patha* (VI. 3. 21). Laṅkā is described as inaccessible--being without navigation routes around it (VI. 3. 21). Sītā, plunged in grief at Laṅkā, is likened to a ship sinking in water on account of its too heavy load (V. 17. 3). Again, she is compared to a loaded ship in mid-stream tossed by winds (V. 25. 14). The allusions to ships in difficult plight on the ocean (V. 28. 8 ; VI. 50. 1 ; 48. 26) indicate the familiarity with oceanic navigation.

The system of barter went by the name of *niṣkraya* (I. 14. 48). Normally, barter deals were calculated in terms of cows. The price of a particular cow is mentioned in terms of many : Viśvāmitra offered to barter a hundred thousand cows in return for Vasiṣṭha's gifted cow (I. 53. 9). Passages can be multiplied to show that though gold and silver had made their appearance during the age and were offered and received by way of gift and remuneration, they could not usurp the place of cows as a means of exchange which alone gave a stamp of finality to the transaction. King Daśaratha gives gold and silver to his priests but along with ten lakhs of cows (I. 14. 50-1). At the termination of the Putreṣṭi, he give away white earth to the sacrificial priests, but the latter wanted as price thereof gems or gold but preferably cows (I. 14. 48-9). *Dakṣiṇā* or sacrificial fee invariably included hundreds and thousands of cows (IV. 5. 4). The Bālakāṇḍa relates the legend of Śunaḥśepa who was bartered by his parents for a hundred thousand cows (I. 61. 13). Thus the cow was regarded as a standard of value in barter transactions obviously because of the abundant cattle wealth of the country.

There is, however, evidence of metallic currency in being is vogue—remunerating services and in exchange dealings. *Niṣka* was the name of the common coin. The king of Kekaya is depicted as giving 2,000 gold *niṣkas* to Bharata (II. 70. 21). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, Rāma orders Lakṣmaṇa to remunerate Kuśa and Lava with 18,000 golds for their excellent performance (VII. 94. 17-8) One thousand *niṣkas* were presented to Suyajña by Rāma (II. 32. 10). Certainly these *niṣkas* were coins, for Bharata or Suyajña could hardly require them for ornaments. It is true that necklace is also called *niṣkas* (V. 2. 25) in the epic, but this was because this ornament of necklace consisted of *niṣkas* or coins. The practice of stringing together coins into a necklace obtains even today in India and was prevalent in ancient times.

It cannot be for sure whether the *niṣka* was a stamped coin in the modern sense, for no coin of the Rāmāyaṇa age has yet been discovered anywhere during the excavations. Unstamped coins must have been of two varieties, gold and silver. Daśaratha is said to have distributed one crore of *jāmbūnadas* to Brāhmaṇas (I. 14. 54). Mention of the countable number clearly alludes to bits or masses of the metal of a definite weight and uniform size conforming to a recognized value. Hence, *jāmbūnada* was a gold coin. It was also named as *sauvarṇa*. Ten crores of them were distributed by Daśaratha among the *ṛtviks*. *Rajatas* were silver coins and forty crores of these were given away to the priests (I 14. 51). It may be surmised that the value of one gold coin was equivalent to that of four silver coins. As they are spoken of as so many gold coins and so many silver coins, there might have been only one type of blank coins.

Existence of some kinds of weights and measures can be clearly adduced. *Droṇa* was a specified measure for liquids. Honey-combs measuring a *droṇa* were observed by Rāma in the forest (II. 56. 8). Division of wealth into specified parts was called *pravibhāga* (I. 14. 52). *Daṇḍa* (VI. 22. 60) was a measuring rod. Area was measured in terms of bows (IV. 11. 72) or 'the length of expanded arms'

(I. 14. 23). *Yojana* was a measure of distance. Vālmīki uses *yojana* in two senses. As a rule, it is four *krośas*. A *krośa* is a *dhanuḥ-sahasra* (one thousand bow-lengths) where a *dhanu* means four cubits (*hastas*) or two yards. A *yojana* is thus 8,000 yards or four and a half miles. But, then, *yojana* is also a *dhanuḥ śata*, one hundred bow-lengths or 200 yards. For instance, when Sugrīva desires to test Rāma's strength, he says that Vālī threw the corpse of Dundubhi a *yojana* distance, and that he would be satisfied about Rāma's strength if the latter lifted the skeleton and threw it to a distance of 400 yards (*dvi-dhanuḥ-śata*). The *yojana* in this sense must be a *dhanuḥ-śata* or 200 yards only and not the usual four and a half miles.[1]

N(a)igama (II. 83. 11), like our guilds, was an organized corporation of artisans or traders belonging to the same profession. It played an important part in civic and political affairs of the kingdom. At the proposed coronation of Rāma were present the various guilds of the merchants and traders (II. 14. 40-1). They are also described as participating in the *abhiṣecana* or sprinkling of the regent (VI. 128. 62). The Rāmāyaṇa mentions *n(a)igama* always with *paura* and *jānapada* and treats the two evidently as connected though distinct. *N(a)igama* was the general term which implied all sorts of commercial associations. *N(a)igamas* were quite a reckonable force (*sammata*) in the civic life of Ayodhyā, since they are found accompanying Bharata to Citrakūṭa to exert their pressure for prevailing upon Rāma to return (II. 83. 11). Vālmīki details the different bodies or classes of trades and arts which evidently made up these *n(a)igama* ; *e.g.*, jewellers, ivory-workers, stucco-workers, goldsmiths, wood-carvers, spice-merchants, and so forth (II. 83. 12-5). Since all these bodies of artisans issue forth from the capital, *n(a)igama* was the general representative body of different trade-guilds and guild-merchants of the capital only, while the sister bodies of *paura* and *jānapada* (II. 2. 19) functioned as the organizations of the citizens and villagers.

The term *śreṇī*, according to Govindarāja, was a synonym for *n(a)igama* (II. 79. 4) and, as such, *śreṇī-mukhyāḥ* referred to the chiefs or presidents of trade-guilds. When Bharata was summoned from his maternal home on the death of Daśaratha, the *śreṇis* sanctioned Bharata's proposed succession ; and this fact was intimated only to him (II. 79. 4). *Śreṇī*, according to Dr Radhakumud Mookerjee, was an assembly composed of men of different castes but following a common vocation. The term *sayodha-śreṇī* implied a corporation of soldiers, or a guild which combined economic and warlike functions.[2]

The term *gaṇa* (II. 14. 40) probably stood for a trade union, and *gaṇa-vallabhas* (II. 81. 12) were the heads of these institutions. When Bharata goes to bring back Rāma from exile, these *gaṇa-vallabhas* too accompany him along with his ministers (II. 81. 12).

The Rāmāyaṇa sets forth the following classes of artisans (*śilpins*, I. 13. 7), as practising their trades in an organized fashion :

Bhūmi-pradeśajña (II. 80. 1)—Persons with knowledge of the moistness or otherwise of the soil.

Carmakṛt (II. 8. 30)—Shoe-makers.

Citrajña (VII. 94. 9)—Painters.

Daivajña (II. 4. 18) or *Daiva-cintaka* (II. 4. 21)—Astrologers.

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[1] T. Paramasiva Iyer: *Rāmāyaṇa and Laṅkā*, pp. 3f.

[2] Beniprasad : State in Ancient India, p. 113.

Dantakāra (II. 83. 13)—Ivory-workers.
Dāsa (I. 74. 5)—Male-servants.
Dāsī (I. 74. 5 ; II. 32. 16)—Maid-servants.
Dhūpaka (II. 83. 14)--Fumigators.
Drasṭārah (II. 80. 3)—Guides.
Durga-vicāraka (II. 79. 13)—Forest-rangers.
Dvaḥstha (VII. 44. 1)—Door-keepers.
Gaṇaka (I. 13. 7)—Astrologers. *Kārtāntika.*
Gandharva (VII. 94. 6)—Musicians.
Gandhopajīvin (II. 83.13)—Incense-makers.
Gaṇikā (I. 10. 5)—Dancing-girls.
Gāyaka (II. 65. 2) or *Gātṛ* (VII. 94. 9)—Songsters.
Kaivartaka (II. 83. 15) or *Dāśa* (II. 89. 7)—Fishermen.
Kambala kāraka (*-dhāvaka*) (II. 83. 14)—Manufactures of wool and woollen fabrics.
Karmāntika (I. 13. 7)—Day-labourers.
Karṇadhāra (II. 52. 81) or *Karṇagrāha* (II. 52. 6)—Pilots.
Karṣaka (II. 112. 12)—Husbandy.
Kārtāntika (VI. 48. 5)—See *Gaṇaka.*
Khanaka (I. 13. 7 ; II. 80. 1)—Miners.
Krākacika (II. 83. 13)—Sawers, carpenters.
Kriyā-kalpavid (VII. 94. 7)—Priests.
Kumdhakāra (II. 83. 12)—Potters.
Lākṣaṇika (VI. 48. 2) or *Lakṣaṇajña* (VII. 94. 6)—Palmists.
Lubdha (II. 12. 77)—Hunters.
Māgadha (II. 65. 2)—Genealogists.
Maṇikāra (II. 83. 12)—Jewellers.
Mārga-dakṣaka (II. 82. 20)—Road-keepers.
Mārga-śodhaka (II. 82. 20)—Road-layers.
Mārgin (II. 80. 2)—Sentinels.
Māyūraka (II. 83. 13)—Featherists, magicians.
Nadīrakṣa (II. 84. 7)—Coastal guards.
Nartaka (I. 13. 7) or *Lāsaka* (VII. 23D. 47)—Dancers.
Naṭa (I. 13. 7 ; II. 6. 14)—Actors, theatre-managers.

Nāvika (II. 52 80) or *Dāśa* (II. 89. 7)—Boatmen.

Pāṇivādaka (II. 65. 4)—Tabla-men.

Parama-nārī (VI. 21. 3) (*Sairandhrī*)—Honorable maids.

Paricārika (I. 45. 34)—Domestic attendants.

Paurānika (VII. 94. 5, 8) or *Purānajña* (VII. 37. 24) –Chroniclers.

Rajaka (II. 83. 15)—Cleaners, dyers.

Rocaka (II. 83. 13)—Burnishers, glass-makers.

Rūpājīvā (II. 36. 3) or *Vāramukhyā* (I. 10. 7)—Society girls.

Śailūsa (II. 83. 15)—Pimps.

Śastropajīvin (II. 83. 12)—Armourers.

Śauṇḍika (II. 83. 14)—Brewers, wine-sellers.

Śaunika (II. 48. 28)—Butchers.

Śilpakāra (I 13. 7)—Artists.

Śilpin (I. 13. 7)—Artisans.

Śmasru-vardhaka (VI. 128. 13)—Barbers.

Snāpaka (II. 83. 14) or *Snāna-śikṣājña* (II. 65. 8)—Bath-attendants.

Sthapati (II. 80. 2)—Architects.

Sūda (III. 56. 25) or *Sūpakāra* (II. 12. 96)—Cooks.

Sudhākāra (II. 80. 3)—White-washers.

Sūta (II. 4. 3 ; 65. 2) or *Paurānika* (I. 18. 20)—Charioteers.

Sūtra-karma-viśārada (II. 80. 1) or *Sūtra-karma-viśeṣajña* (II. 83. 12)—Tailors,

Suvarṇakāra (II. 83. 14)—Goldsmiths.

Svastika (II. 16. 46)—Panegyrists.

Tālāva (-pa) cara (II. 3. 17 ; VII. 91. 15)—Drummers.

Tunnavāya (II. 83. 15)—Tailors.

Uṣṇodaka (II. 83. 14)—Shampooers.

Vādaka (II. 16. 46) or *Vādin* (II. 36. 3)—Instrumentalists.

Vaidya (II. 83. 14)—Physicians.

Vaitālika (VI. 127. 3) or *Vandin* (II. 65. 1)—Eulogists.

Vaṁśakṛt (II. 80. 3)—'Family's pride.'

Vaṇik (II. 6. 12)—Traders.

Vardhakin (II. 80. 2 ; I. 13. 7)—Carpenters.

Vedhaka (II. 83. 13)—Goldsmiths.

Viṣṭi (VI. 127. 6)—Labourers paid in kind.

Viśvakarmā (VII. 5. 18)—Superintending engineers.

Vṛkṣa-takṣaka (II. 80. 2)—Foresters.

Vyādha (II. 36. 5) or *Niṣāda* (I. 2. 10) –Fowlers.

Yājaka (I. 14. 3)—Priests.

Yantraka (II. 80. 1)—River-engineers.

Trade and commerce depend on efficient and speedy means of communication. And this latter had an important bearing then as much as now on the economic life of the period. Land routes were the most frequent means of communication. Cities were provided with spacious and well-laid-out roads (II. 86. 19), and these were carefully looked after. They were daily swept and well watered (I. 5. 8) to keep down the dust, which indicates that they were not paved. The streets in Ayodhyā (II. 6. 18) and Laṅkā (V. 3. 19) were lit with lamps on posts (*dīpa-vṛkṣas*). On festive occasions, the highways were tastefully decorated with flowers and festoons and incensed with fragrant substances (VI. 127. 8 ; II. 17. 3). Roads ran from the cities connecting them to other cities and villages in the country. These roads were such that vehicles could be plied on them. A road fit for vehicular traffic ran from the town of Girivraja in Kekaya to Ayodhyā. It took Bharata eight days to traverse the distance in a chariot (II. 71). Rāma, bound for the forest, is said to have come upon, after crossing the Tamasā, a safe and goodly highway capable of inspiring even the timid with confidence (II. 46. 29). A road ran from Ayodhyā to the banks of the Gaṅgā over which Rāma travelled in a chariot. In fact, the populous tracts of Northern India were spread over with a net-work of roads over which brisk traffic was carried on for commercial and other purposes. These, however, became unusable during rains (IV. 28. 16).

The hermitages of the forest were also interconnected with roads. Mārīca's *āśrama*, not very far from the Indian coast opposite to the island of Laṅkā, could be reached by road on mule-driven chariots. A pleasant and safe road connected Bharadvāja's *āśrama* and the hermit-colony of Citrakūṭa. Pañcavaṭī itself was not in a trackless wilderness. There was one road leading from Agastya's *āśrama* to it, and the road by which Rāma travelled southwards from it, in search of Sītā, led right across the plateau to Pampā and Ṛṣyamūka (beside the monastery of Mataṅga), and thence to Kiṣkindhā.

Occasional repair of roads is also in evidence. On the eve of Rāma's return to Ayodhyā from exile, the entrire roadway from the capital to Nandigrāma was thoroughly repaired, and all uneven ground was properly levelled (VI. 127. 6-7). Laying out of new highways over wild tracts was undertaken by the State. Before Bharata proceeded to Citrakūṭa, he ordered artisans to lay out roads in uneven tracts (II. 79. 13). The whole description (II. 80) can be taken as a typical example of road engineering current then. Numerous men, skilled in road construction, set out with requisite implements. They included those who had a knowledge of the slopes of the land (*bhūmi-pradeśajña*), delvers (*khanaka*), architects (*sthapati*) and experts in the construction of canals and water-courses (*yantraka*, II. 80. 1-2). Hewing away boughs, plants, shrubs, woody projections, stones and diverse trees, they went on preparing 'the ground.' By their organized work, trees were set up where there were none, unwanted trees and masses of *vīraṇa* shrubs were uprooted, rising grounds and deep places were levelled up, wells and hollows were filled up with earth, rocks were cut through, bridges were put up over watery expanses, the earth was broken (and excavation was carried on whereven needed, II. 80. 6-10). The highway was obviously made to cope with the huge traffic of the four-fold army—consisting of numerous vehicles and men.

A still more eloquent proof of the high level of efficiency of civil engineering of the day is afforded by the construction of the Bridge across the ocean to Laṅkā (fig. 93). In building the bridges across this infinite depth and breadth in time, remarkable speed and dexterity must have been displayed by the Vānara forces. Engines or cranes were used for uprooting trees and crags and transporting them to the edge of the water. *Sūtras* (measuring lines) were used by the builders to be sure that the rocks were laid out in a straight line. *Daṇḍas* or measuring rods were also used. Small stones, grass, creepers and sticks (*kāṣṭhas*) were used as building material. The Vānaras threw the huge trees first, then weighted them with rocks and used small stones, sticks, grass and creepers as materials for filling the crevices. The co-operation and co-ordination between the different workers was so perfect that within five days the marvellous structure stood complete finished (VI. 22. 56-76).

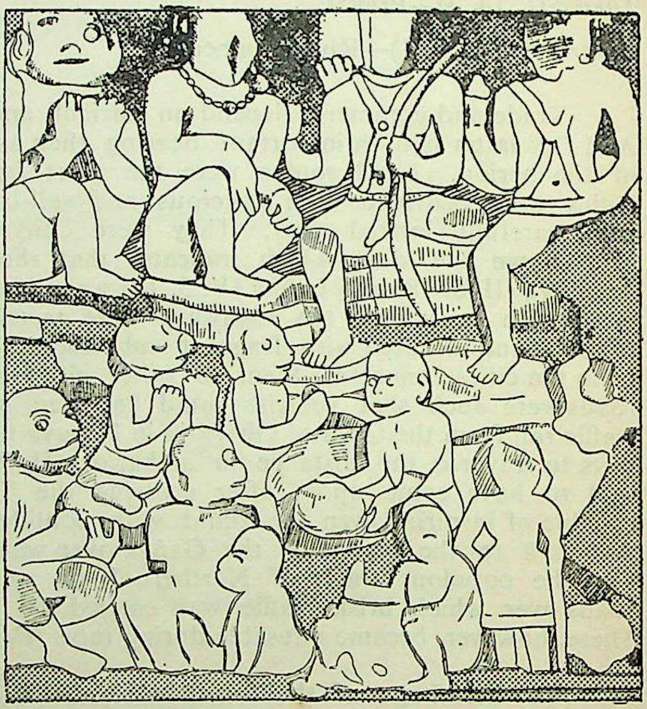

Fig. 93. Vānaras building the bridge to Laṅkā ; Gupta. *c.* fifth-sixth century A.D. (Press Information Bureau, Government of India ; courtesy : Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi).

The vehicles used for carrying, and conveying, men and goods from one place to another were known as *yānas* (II. 92. 35). The commonest of *yānas* used by men-folk was the *ratha* or chariot (sort of a buggy), an indispensable vehicle for civil and military purposes. In cities *rathas* catered for the everyday needs of the citizens (II. 67. 25). Highways resounded with the hum and bustle of fast-going chariots (II. 114. 21). Chariots were of three kinds : *aupavāhya-ratha* (II. 39. 10) or the utility car, *sāṅgrāmika-ratha* (III. 65. 6) or the war-chariot (fig. 94), and *puṣpa-ratha* (II. 26. 15) or the decorated sport-car. Even these last were fairly huge (*mahārathas*, VI. 71. 9), spacious enough to carry attendants (III. 64. 50) as well as supplies (V. 47. 5; VI. 71. 20).

Śibikās (V. 6. 36) or palanquins (fig. 95) were also used as a conveyance especially over hilly regions. They must have been largly used by hill tribes like the Vānaras. Sugrīva is described as going to see Rāma seated in one borne by several men (IV. 38. 9). Among the Rākṣasas, it was used as a dignified vehicle for conveyance of women. The battle over, Vibhīṣaṇa brought to Rāma's presence Sītā seated in a palanquin (VI. 114. 15).

Other vehicles for the transport of goods were the *śakaṭas* (I. 31. 17), which were wagons or carts driven by oxen (for they are also called *go-rathas*, II. 83. 16).

When Viśvāmitra started from Siddhāśrama, for Mithilā, he was followed by several hermits with a hundred wagons (I. 31. 17). Pack-bulls and pack-horses were also used for transport of commercial goods. A hundred and fifty Janaka's men are said to have dragged up the iron chest (with eight wheels) counting the famous Bow (I. 67. 4).

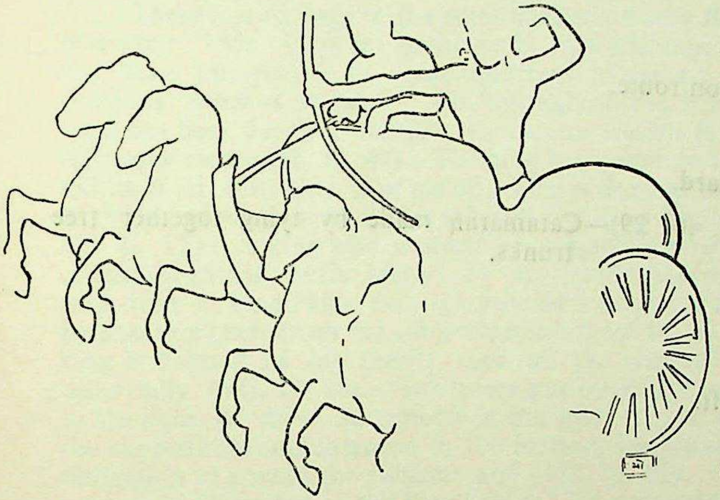

Fig. 94. *Sāṁgrāmika-ratha* (war-chariot) ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

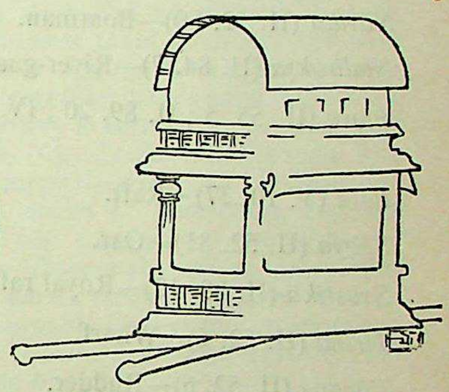

Fig. 95. *Śibikā* (palanquin carried by men); Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Employment of boats as a means of inland communication merits notice. Boats were plied both with oars and with the help of sails. They were used as links over roads intersected by rivers. Viśvāmitra, along with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, crossed the Gaṅgā on a hermit boat, with decks comfortably carpeted and canopied (*sukhāstīrṇa*) (I. 45. 6-7). Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā are said to have crossed the Gaṅgā in a spacious boat which was swift, strong and fair with rudders, oars and men (II. 52. 6). An inland king like Guha could command hundreds of Kaivarta youngfolks to lie in wait for obstructing the enemy's passage with 500 ships. Each ship was to carry 100 armed Kaivartas (II. 84. 8). These ships were probably of the variety *agra-mandirā* (with cabins towards prow) which are used in dry season and are eminently suited to long voyages and naval warfare.[1] These boats were also used for ordinary transport purposes. Five hundred boats were employed for the transporation of Bharata's army across the Gaṅgā (II. 89. 10). As the boats were meant to carry a huge host of soldiers—women, animals, chariots and provisions (II. 89. 13·7)—they must have been very large and capacious like ships. The boats meant for royalty bore banners and large-bells on their prows and were well-decked, furnished with oars, manned by barge-men and had firm joints (II. 89. 11). They were designated as *svastika* (II. 89. 11) boats, being larger than ordinary boats, perhaps constructed in the shape of a *svastika* An awning of white woollen carpet was spread in them (*pāṇḍu-kambala-saṁvṛtā*, II. 89. 12). After landing the occupants on the other shore, the retainers of Guha displayed various manoeuvres of the boats for sport (*kāṇḍacitrāṇi*, II. 89. 18). Besides boats, rafts (*pota*, V. 10. 37), catamarans (*plava*, II. 55. 14) and jars (*kumbha-ghaṭa*, II. 89. 20) were also used for crossing rivers. The nautical terms met with in the Rāmāyaṇa are :

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[1] R. K. Mookerjee : *A History of Indian Shipping*, p. 26.

Dāśa (II. 89. 7, 21)—Boatman.

Karṇa (II. 52. 81)—Rudder.

Karṇagrāha (II. 52. 6) or *Karṇadhāra* (II. 52. 81)—Pilot.

Mahānau (V. 57. 4)—Ship.

Nau (II. 52. 9 ; I. 24. 2)—Boat.

Naupatha (VI. 3. 21)—Navigation route.

Nāvika (II. 52. 80)—Boatman.

Nadīrakṣa (II. 84. 7)—River-guard.

Plava (II. 55. 5 ; II. 89. 20 ; IV. 40. 29)—Catamaran made by tying together tree trunks.

Pota (V. 10. 37)—Raft.

Sphya (II. 52. 81)—Oar.

Svastika (II. 89. 12)—Royal raft.

Tirtha (II. 52. 6)—Wharf.

Vāhana (II. 52. 6)—Rudder.

Air transport is also in evidence. The aerial car was known an *khaga* (III. 42. 7) or *vimāna* (III. 42. 9). Sītā speaks of excursions in the airy path (*vaihāyasa-gata*, II. 27. 9). After spotting the whereabouts of Sītā, Aṅgada and his party are said to have returned to Sugrīva by the aerial route (V. 64. 23-6). Rāvaṇa was the possessor of the famous aerial car, Puṣpaka, which after his death became the property of Rāma. The epic does not furnish definite information about the mechanism of these airplanes, but it would be wrong to dismiss the entire evidence as a figment of imagination.

To sum up, general economic condition in the age of Vālmīki was marked by affluence, plenty and joys of life. Long and lavish descriptions of a general state of prosperity are found in the epic. During Daśaratha's reign, Ayodhyā and the provinces had attained a high level of prosperity and the people possessed a plentiful supply of the good things of life. Standard of living was of a high order. They donned costly dress, ate rich food, and drank costly, exhilarating drinks. Percentage of literacy was high. People were happy and righteous, content in their respective professions—never covetously seeking for more (I. 6).

Countryside was blest with foodgrains, and the people were charitably disposed. It was a lovely kingdom undisturbed by fears, and marked by countless shrines and sacrificial posts, mango-groves, gardens and pleasant streams. It was a prosperous and smiling country inhabited by a well-fed, brawny-brainy, contented people, full of lovely villas and parks, with countless cows grazing the meadows (II. 50. 8-11). An insight into the flourishing state of Kosala can be had from the searching questions which Rāma puts to Bharata at Citrakūṭa : "Are not the provinces filled with happiness, and graced with shrines of deities, reservoirs and tanks of water, mines for wealth and routes, free from all fears of wild animals and unrighteous men, do not the provinces enjoy good life, good time ? Do not agriculturists and cowherds find favour in your eyes? And do they not, remaining in their respective vocations, receive from you what they want and overcome their distress, regularly?" (II. 100. 43-8). Not only the countryside, the cities also stood out with their economic wealth and human happiness in all walks.

There is a passage in the Ayodhākāṇḍa where Rāma is represented as asking Bharata: "Are incomes great and expenditures slender?" (II. 100. 54). This has been interpreted in some quarters to mean: "Let the king tax the people he rules as much as he can."[1] But throughout the Rāmāyaṇa all taxation more than legal has been decried. Rāma's enormous wealth is described as earned through righteous means (II. 32. 44). The king is advised to impose taxes gradually and with mildness (II. 100. 27). The sin of a king is deemed to be mighty if he takes away a sixth part of the income of his subjects but does not treat them as his sons (II. 75. 25; III. 6. 11). A king who protects his subjects righteously is entitled to a fourth part of the spiritual merit reaped by an ascetic (III. 6. 14). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, it is said that a king who fails to rule well does not enjoy the merits of his subjects; by exacting taxes from the subjects, but failing in his duties of protection, etc., the king is robbed of his merits and all the sins of his subjects devolve on him—deservedly (VII. 74. 30). The query put by Rāma to Bharata should be interpreted in the light of these statements in the epic. It, no doubt, stresses the need to keep the expenditure outbalanced by the income, but inescapably implies a corresponding obligation to govern the subjects well (VII. 74. 31). The *bali-ṣaḍ-bhāga* (III. 6. 11) was mainly intended as the king's wages for protecting his subjects.

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1. Cf. E. W. Hopkins: *Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India* (*Journal of American Oriental Society*. xiii, p. 86).

CHAPTER XX

TOWN-PLANNING

The cultural significance of towns, town-planning and town-life can hardly be overemphasized. "A city as a concrete expression of the motive forces and ideas regulating the life of citizens is the noblest monument of human art and conception. In its genesis is wrapped up, in a great measure, the evolution of the civilization of the people who build it."[1]

While the Vedic and Brahmanical cultures were essentially rural, the culture represented by the Rāmāyaṇa is predominantly urban, and the epic presents to the reader's horizon a large number of cities dotted all over Northern India stretching from Assam to Afghanistan. A study of the layout of big cities, as described in the epic, testifies to their conscious and scientific planning, proving thereby that town-planning in the age must have reached a high stage of development. The literature of the period, however, makes no reference to any current works on town-planning. The epic only alludes to the sub-Veda named *Sthāpatya* (I. 13. 6). Nevertheless, the antiquity of the science of town-planning is confirmed by the mention in the Rāmāyaṇa of the patronymic Viśvakarmā (V. 2. 20, 22 ; I. 75. 11), the architect divine, and of apotheosized master builders like Manu (I. 5. 6) and Maya (V. 7. 4).

Owing to the insecurity of life and residence in ancient times, ramparts and trenches constituted an integral part of oriental as well as occidental town-planning. They formed the *sine qua non* of the Aryan habitations, so much so that the description of a town in ancient India rarely misses mentioning them.[2] In fact, originally a town was a fort (*durga*) and a fort was a town (*pura*), both being synonymous for practical purposes.

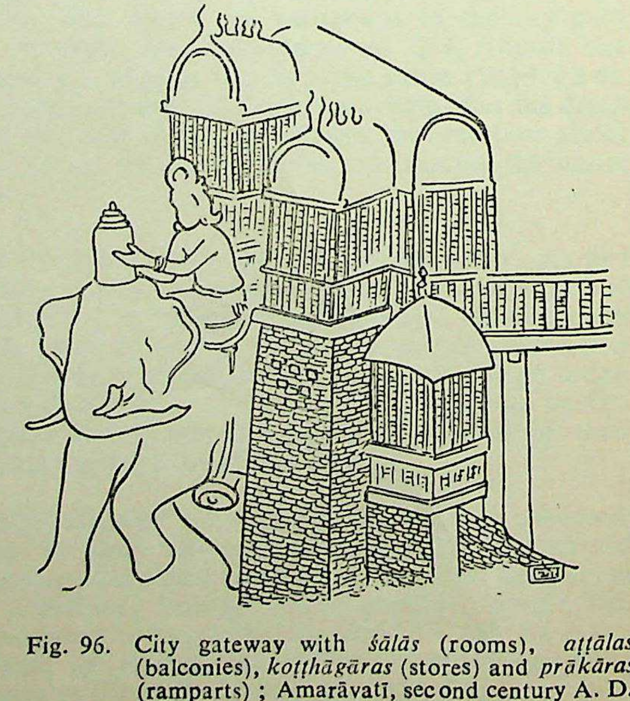

Fig. 96. City gateway with *śālās* (rooms), *aṭṭālas* (balconies), *koṭṭhāgāras* (stores) and *prākāras* (ramparts) ; Amarāvatī, second century A. D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Thus the ancient Indo-Aryan cities, like the Anglo-Saxon boroughs of old, arose primarily out of military necessity. The chief cities of the Rāmāyaṇa period were therefore walled around, fortified with strong defences to resist attacks. The forts were always kept as if in a state of siege, equipped with war materials in the form of wealth, foodgrains, arms, machines, artisans and archers (II. 100. 53). The city of Sāṁkāśya was girt round with lofty ramparts (I. 70. 3), while that of Rājagṛha was provided with invulnerable walls (I. 70. 1). The city of Vārāṇasī was well-guarded, enclosed by strong walls on all sides and had well decorated gateways (VII. 38. 17). The walls effectively secured the city against spying (V. 4. 26). The line of the rampart wall (*prākāra*) had massive heavy-panelled gates interspersed with *gopurāṭṭālakas*. *Aṭṭa* or *aṭṭālaka* (V. 2. 17) means a tower, and every city gateway (*gopura*) was provided with such towers for watch and ward, and defence (fig. 96). The word *gopura* (VI. 42. 18) was also used to denote the stupendous defensive structures forming an integral part of the extensive fortifications of the Indo-Aryan cities in the shape of embattled walls and deep trenches. *Toraṇa* was the ornamental arch generally without a door outside the city gateway.

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[1] B. B. Dutt : *Town-planning in Ancient India*, p. 18.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Outside the city walls, and not very close to them, there used to be a moat (*parikhā*, V. 2. 14) filled with water and aquatic animals (VI. 3. 15). The moat was wide and deep enough to cause serious obstruction in the event of an attack. As far as possible, the advantages of defence afforded by nature were availed of and towns were ordinarily built on river banks (Ayodhyā, I. 5. 5), on sea-shore, on an island (Laṅkā, VI. 3. 21), in a mountainous region (Kiṣkindhā, IV. 31. 16) or in a forest tract (Kaliṅga, II. 71. 16). The city of Laṅkā had most of these natural defences and, thus, assured the Rākṣasas an impregnable sanctuary (VII. 5. 27).

To consolidate conquests in an alien territory, towns were sometimes raised at important strategic points as fortified outposts, which eventually developed into great seats of urban culture. There are several instances of them in the Uttarakāṇḍa. The city of Takṣaśilā, founded by Bharata after conquering the land of the Gandharvas, owed its importance to its strategic position. Being situated at the head of the Indus valley, the great artery of commerce in Northern India, its commercial importance was enhanced manifold. But it should be noted that these cities of ancient times were primarily the ultimate resorts for the people fleeing from hostile invaders, and only secondarily, centres of trade and corporate life. Military exigencies of the times necessitated it, so that there could hardly be a purely commercial town as such. Commercial and other cultural activities, naturally, would follow only in the wake of complete security of life and property.

Though primarily built as military posts, the great cities of Rāmāyaṇa age were none the less meticulously planned for civilian needs as models of architectural elegance and symmetrical beauty. Behind the rugged exteriors of moats, walls, forests or unscalable heights were properly planned picturesque cities, furnished with civic amenities. The mountain fastness of Ṛkṣabila was a model of consummate workmanship, constructed by Maya, an architect with artistic imagination, who had the resources to muster requisite materials for the purpose (IV. 50). From the description of several cities in the epic, one cannot resist the conclusion that despite their growth as formidable fortresses, at a certain stage they received the attention of master technicians and, in due course, burgeoned into cities of lovely layout.

In the selection of a site for founding a town, attention was paid to the evenness of land (I. 5. 17), healthy and sanitary surroundings (VII. 102. 5-6), and close proximity to supplies of water and foodstuffs (I. 5. 17). River sites offered the best facilities for the establishment and growth of cities, because a river is not only a convenient means of communication with the countryside, a facile means of transport and locomotion, but it also offers an outlet into the world at large, thus fostering and encouraging commerce. Rivers were national assets of no mean importance. From time immemorial, when the nomadic Aryans were advancing southward, the great rivers of India had offered the best routes for their progress, Hence the earliest Indo-Aryan cities were laid in the valleys of the Indus and the Gaṅgā. Besides, a river-site is naturally difficult of invasion in times of war even as it is easy of access in times of peace. It has also a never-failing sanitary value—

serving, as a bowl for the offal of the city. These reasons, combined with other local advantages, have proved conducive to the evolution of a great many Indo-Aryan settlements as riparian towns. It is worth noting that orthodox treatises on *śilpaśāstra* recommend founding of towns on the right bank of a river.[1]

The cities also varied in shape—square, rectangular, octagonal, circular, elliptic, lotus, bow or sickle-shaped—each having a technical appellation for its geometrical form and each with its own, peculiar, planning of streets and distribution of public places and buildings. The cities were laid out in several sectors, finely constructed and regular, measured in convenient squares and open places, with intersecting roads clean and even, and regular rows of open shops, well provided with parks and gardens, lakes, lotus-ponds and wells, adorned with many kinds of temples dedicated to different gods—faultless in their finish (*avicchidrā*, I. 5. 17). They were provided with gardens, orchards and avenues. Mango, *sāla*, *tamāla* and other trees were planted on either side of the streets and at intersections of the streets. Sufficient open space was allowed so that cultivable fields were not uncommon. These fields, as also the open roads with wayside trees, gave a healthy rural look, besides other advantages, to the urban settlements.

At the centre of the town were erected the imperial mansions. Four principal streets (*rājamārgas*) radiated from this central point and terminated at the four city gates surmounted by arches and turrets. The growth of the cities was always from within, ample provision being made for their extension as occasion demanded. The palaces served as the nucleus of the town, rich houses being built around them, and thus the city would grow and expand gradually. This is clear from a description of Ayodhyā. Rich merchants and nobility were housed on the central streets of the city, encircling the palace (V. 12. 18), evidently separated from the outer environs by lawns and flower gardens. This shows that the planning of the streets proceeded on rational lines with due regard to the practical requirements of an orderly growth of houses and to the scope for future development. The walls and ditches of the city with its belt of stately trees (*sāla-mekhalā*, I. 5. 12) imparted to the town a look of solidity and a corporate quality, while it prevented a mushrooming of clumsy outskirts.

Off the outskirts would begin the countryside, their walls marking its natural boundaries and providing for possible development of suburbs in future. In the region adjoining the city walls lay wide belts of jungle (II. 71. 16) or agricultural land,[2] or close sequestered retreats for hermits and philosophers (II. 67. 26), or extensive areas set apart for training elephants and horses.[3] These belts served as invaluable breathing spaces, exquisite with warbling birds and blooming flowers or providing rich game land for pleasant hunting excursions for the king and his suite (II. 49. 14). Also *gṛhātigṛhakas* (V. 12. 15) and *ārāmas* (pleasure houses, II. 60 3) were constructed away from city dwellings. A city of this design was known as a *mahāpurī* (I. 5. 7)

These characteristics gave a peculiar stamp to Indian civic life and gave the Indian cities their distinctive mark of individuality, which evoked the wonder and admiration of foreign visitors (V. 3. 12 ; VI. 39. 26).

The ancient kings took great delight in town-building. The city of Ayodhyā was the hereditary capital of the kings of the Ikṣvāku dynasty. During Daśaratha's reign, it became the premier among northern cities (*puravara*, I. 6. 6). The city of Laṅkā owed its splendour and affluence to the keen aesthetic perceptions of Rāvaṇa. Even during times of war, monarchs took great care to see that their armies did not devastate the towns that fell to them. Rāma had instructed the Vānara hosts scrupulously to refrain from disturbing towns and villages on their way to Laṅkā (VI. 4. 39).

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[1] B. B. Dutt : *op. cit.*, pp. 27-8.

[2] Rāma on leaving Ayodhyā passed through fields on the outskirts of villages (II. 49. 3).

[3] As can be inferred from Rāma's advice to Bharata to look after and protect the elephant-breeding forests (II. 100. 50).

So much for the general characteristics of cities of the age. A description of some of the major cities of India during the Rāmāyaṇa period detailed below fully substantiates the view that they were no haphazard growth but were models of town-planning.

The city of Ayodhyā, the story goes, was founded by Manu, and Ikṣvāku was its first king. It had attained great splendour long before Rāma. It was a mighty and magnificent city, situated along the banks of the Sarayū on a level plain. It was well fortified, surrounded by a high wall and a deep moat filled with water. The wall had lofty gates furnished with doors and bolts. The gates were ornamented with artistic designs or porticos (*toraṇas*) Furnished with all kinds of equipment, and destructive weapons like *śataghnīs*, and inhabited by brave militia, mechanics, horses and elephants (I. 5), it looked like a veritable bulwark vast and invincible—as suggested by its very name—*Ayodhyā*, the impregnable or unassailable (*satyanāmā*, II. 100. 40). During the political crisis in Kosala owing to the succession trouble in the dynasty, the city was left defenceless. With its walls unguarded, its horses and elephants unrestrained and its gates left open, the defenceless metropolis was placed in a perilous position, invitingly exposed to the covetous eyes of the enemy (II. 88. 24-5).

The city was intersected by a network of fine, spacious roads, laid out in proper order and scientifically disposed with well-arranged rows of houses and shops on either side (I. 5. 7, 10). The streets and alleys were known as *rathyās*, and the main thoroughfares leading to and from the palace as *rājamārgas* (I. 4. 29). The highways were regularly swept, watered and on ceremonial occasions strewn with flowers (I. 5. 8). They were furnished with lamp posts (II. 6. 18). At intervals, squares (*catvaras*) were maintained where people gathered for pleasure and discourse (II. 6. 15). There were also water-sheds (*prapās*, II. 100. 43) for free distribution of drinking water. Town-halls (*sabhās*, II. 6. 13) were there, too, for meetings and debates.

The city swarmed with dwelling houses (*gṛhagāḍhā*, I. 5. 17), and embellished with pinnacled edifices and magnificent palaces—its domes resembling mountain-peaks, (I. 5. 15). The layout of houses was symmetrically planned—their fronts harmoniously aligned (*suniveśitaveśmāntā*, I. 5. 19), thus forming one continuous row (VI. 123. 54). The buildings were generally huge and majestic, some seven-storeyed and some inlaid with precious stones.

The planning of Ayodhyā with its peculiar layout of streets and houses gave it the shape of an octagonal chess-board (*aṣṭāpadākārā*, I. 5. 16). This chess-board pattern of town-planning is known in *śilpaśāstra* as *daṇḍaka*-type : rectangular in form, with two main gates, at times four, every unit in it being practically—rectangular in shape, its roads running in all directions – the entire then surrounded by a ditch and a rampart.[1] Schlegel. however, thinks that the term *aṣṭāpada* refers to the marbles of different colours with which the houses were adorned.[2] It seems more natural, though, to understand it as implying the symmetrical town-planning of Ayodhyā with the royal palace in the centre, the main thoroughfares running in four directions with regular rows of buildings on either side.

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[1] P. K. Acharya : *Villages and Towns in Ancient India* (*B. C. Law Volume*, ii. p. 276).

[2] Griffith's translation of the Rāmāyaṇa, p. 13, footnote 3.

Nandigrāma, from where Bharata ruled the country in the absence of Rāma, was a suburb of Ayodhyā situated at a distance of one *krośa* from the capital, with its environs shaded by trees in blossom (VI. 125. 28-9).

The city of Laṅkā was extraordinarily well-fortified, for both defensive and offensive purposes. It was located on the shore of the southern ocean on the Trikūṭa Hill (VII. 5. 22-3), surrounded by dense forests (VI. 26. 13 ; 39. 1). The flanks of the hill were finely chiselled so as to be unscalable (*nirālambā*, VI. 3. 20). It was thus a triple combination of a *jala-durga*, a *giri-durga* and a *vana-durga*—an island fortress, a mountain fastness and a forest sanctuary. To cap all, it was also a *kṛtrima-durga* or a *sthala-durga* (an artificial or land fort)—sufficiently armoured as it was (VI. 3. 20).

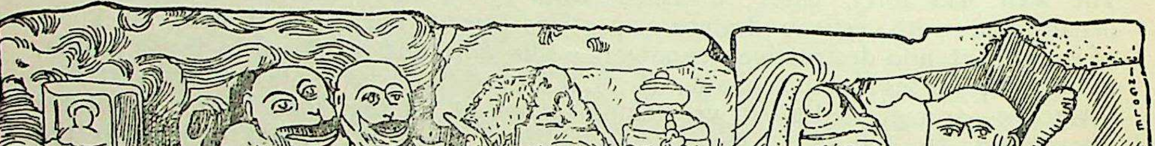

Fig. 97. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva with the Vānara army march over the bridge to Laṅkā ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The fort of Laṅkā is described by Vālmīki in the third canto of the Yuddhakāṇḍa thus : "It was surrounded by a deep and wide moat filled with water, containing wild aquatic animals, followed by mighty rampart walls. It had four giant gates in the four quarters, firmly established with huge and massive doors and fastened with iron bolts. Above them were stationed several kinds of powerful arms, stones and machines to stall an approaching foe. At the entrances, and probably mounted on the gate towers, were hundreds of steel *śataghnīs* (cannon), and turrets for hurling stones and missiles at the enemy (*iṣūpalayantra*). They were arranged and set in order by bands of heroic Rākṣasas. The city rampart (*prākāra*) was made impassable, its inside was decorated with costly adamant stones. The fort could be approached from outside by means of the four drawbridges (*saṅkramas*) only. They were protected on both sides with huge destructive contrivances meant for hurling at invading forces down into the moat. The northern drawbridge was made especially large and strong, and contained platforms supported by pillars. There were no navigation routes round the island and, so, it was inaccessible. The whole fort was full of arsenals, and garrisoned with horses and elephants and hundreds of brave Rākṣasas." The conning or observation towers, called *caityas*, and occupied by guards or *caityapālas* (V. 43. 13), were probably situated on the crossways.

The remarkable fortification (*durga-karma-vidhāna*, V. 53. 14) of the citadel of Laṅkā was matched by the artistic planning of the civil town. The city covered an area of twenty *yojanas* in length and ten *yojanas* in width (VI. 39. 20). It was built by Viśvakarmā for the habitation of the Rākṣasas (IV. 58. 20 ; V. 2. 22 ; VI. 24. 9). Enclosed by a mighty wall (VI. 38. 10) radiant like sunshine (IV. 58. 22) and exceedingly splendid with its grand gateways (VI. 38. 10), Laṅkā, with its towering position on the summit of a hill (VI. 24. 9) overlooking the sea, and its myriads of majestic gold-gleaming palaces (IV. 58. 22), appeared to be built in the air (VI. 38. 10)... scraping the heavens (VI. 24. 9). The gateways were made of ornamented and jewelled arches, furnished with mosaic of precious gold, and had golden apartments (VI. 48. 10). The northern gate, facing India, was a colossal structure (V. 2. 23). The rampart walls had inside them *vapras* or daises, while at their top were towers or *aṭṭālakas* (V. 2. 21). Some space was left between the ramparts and the moat, which was all filled with Vānaras during the siege of Laṅkā (VI. 41. 97).

The city was well divided by highways (*suvibhakta-mahāpathā*, VII. 11. 48). The central thoroughfare was lined with green lawns, flowers, shrubs and trees emitting pleasant smells (V. 2. 6). The streets thronged with edifices (V. 53. 20), and were lighted (V. 3. 19). The lanes and bye-lanes were known as *upa-rathyās* (V. 53. 21) and *caryās* (VI. 75. 6). The main street was strewn with blossoms (V. 4. 4). Squares (*catuṣkas*, V. 53. 21) and crossing (*śṛṅgāṭakas*, V. 53. 20) were maintained. At crossings were planted daisies (V. 12. 18). There were rows of whitewashed edifices resembling autumnal clouds, having golden pillars and net-work (V. 2. 49, 53 ; 3. 3). The buildings had small towers (*sāṭṭa*, V. 55. 32) on them. The houses weer tall and majestic, seven-storey and eight-storey high, studded with crystal, adorned with gold and embellished ornamentally (V. 2. 50). The dwellings of the Rākṣasas had attractive arches which lent splendour to the city. Open space was always kept between every two houses (*gṛhāntara*, V. 53. 21). The entire habitat was measured out into regular and suitable quarters with wide squares and open palaces (V. 53. 20) The dwellings were on all sides, various and of diverse colours (V. 4. 10), distributed in the shape of the petals of a lotus (V. 4. 7), treasured with various kind of wealth, faultless and laid out on aesthetic principles (V. 7. 3-4). The palaces were close on each other, containing large enclosures (V. 6. 44), provided with bowers, picture-galleries, stadia, subterranean cellars and night-shelters intended for rest (V. 12. 1, 13, 15). The main edifices had sub-quarters (*śālā*) with attics at the top (*candra-śālā*, V. 7. 2). Extensive tracts were covered with shady trees, bearing flowers and fruits as per season (V. 2. 13). The city was beautified with gardens, garnished with groves and woods (III. 48. 12 ; VI. 41. 31 ; V. 3. 34), and crowned with variegated ensigns and standards (VI. 42. 7). Each house had, attached to it, a lawn or a garden (*niṣkuṭa*, V. 12. 14). To set fire to Lānka, Hanumān ranged from house to house...off gardens and stately piles (V. 54. 7). Altogether, "it was a flourishing and wealthy city (VI. 39. 25), wonderful and of inconceivable loveliness" (V. 2. 52).

Kiṣkindhā, the Vānara capital, was a *mahāpurī*, situated in a mountainous region (*giri-saṅkaṭe*, IV. 31. 16) in the vicinity of Mt. Prasravaṇa (IV. 27. 26). It was situated in a cave (*giri-gahvare*, IV. 26. 41) amidst charming surroundings. The approaches to the city lay through a dense forest, abounding in hills and dales, rills and caverns infested with wild beasts (IV. 13. 5-12). Śuka, Rāvaṇa's spy, described Kiṣkindhā as clad in dense forests, and as the most inaccessible of forts (VI. 28. 30). In the vicinity of the city itself lay a dense forest which was availed of by Rāma and his companions as vantage-ground to shoot, unseen, at Vālī (IV. 12. 14; 14. 1). Dundubhi, before his encounter with Vālī, had felled some of the trees that grew around it (IV. 11. 27).

The defence arrangements, identical with those of the other cities, did not mar the architectural beauty of the city, which was well-provided with gardens (IV. 27. 26), abundant gems, heavenly, beautiful, full of charming palaces and mansions, decorated with precious stones, abloom with all sorts of trees, and crowded with Vānaras—decently clad and wearing unfading garlands—who could assume various forms at will (IV. 33. 4-6). On the highway were situated the strongly built mansions of the principal Vānara chiefs (IV. 33. 12). The royal palace was girt round with a marble-white rocky rampart difficult to approach (IV. 33. 14). The city was inhabited by stout people and was fragrant with sandal-wood smell, and mixed aroma of *aguru*, lotuses (IV. 33. 7), honey and wine. It was a city of incomparable beauty (*atulaprabhā*, IV. 11. 21).

In the face of such glowing and glamorous pictures of ancient cities, the cities of our own epoch, in spite of the scientific progress of the age, might appear rather commonplace. This has led some critics to believe that the poet has merely displayed his exuberant imagination and that the descriptions of cities in the epic do not represent actuality. In this connection, it must be remembered that Vālmīki did not aim at writing a scientist's dry-and-cut treatise on town-planning giving minute and technical details of forms and shape, but at presenting a graphic and impassioned delineation of ancient India's living cities in relation to man's emotional and moral nature. This does not necessarily postulate a divorce from reality. "Prurient fancy may extol and exaggerate, but it never suffices to create names of material objects which the fanciful have never seen or heard of; a Ruskin may amuse himself and his readers by building an imaginary palace in air for the habitation of an imaginary queen of the air, but his ideas are always of the earth, earthy, taken from material objects with which he is familiar."[1]

As a matter of fact, the correctness of the details of town-planning as depicted in the epic, though free from all technical jargon, can be ascertained by reference to the later treatises on *vāstu-vidyā* and *śilpaśāstra*, which must have been based on the principles of planning hinted at in the literature preceding them. The prescriptions of the *Mānasāra*, for instance, reflect the conditions of town-planning as they obtained during the epic period.[2] Further, it will be interesting to know that just as recent excavations in Greece have borne out the description of a palace by Homer in his *Iliad*, in the same way, future excavations in the Uttara Pradesh may throw light on the system of town-planning in the early epic age.[3] The Indian poets may be fond of exaggeration but their account cannot be summarily brushed aside as untrustworthy, unless it is disproved or rendered unreliable by some incontrovertible evidence.

The city architecture naturally shaped the civilization and aesthetics of the town-dwellers. Just as the culture of the citizens gave form and tone to the city, in the same way the city reacted upon the life of its citizens. The city and citizens were inextricably inter-connected ; the influence of the one wove itself into the life and evolution of the other.

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[1] Rajendralal Mitra : *Indo-Aryans*, vol. i, pp. 23-4.

[2] P. K. Acharya : *op. cit.*, p. 280.

[3] P. C. Dharmā ; *The Rāmāyaṇa Polity*, p. 4, footnote 1.

If some of the details of town-planning, as described in the foregoing paragraphs, are scrutinized, some striking conclusions will follow, unfolding the moral and aesthetic tastes, and the keen civic consciousness of the ancient town-dwellers.

At the first blush, it is apparent that the artistic needs of the city were in no wise subordinate to the military exigencies of the times. Invincibility of the fortified town went hand in hand with the artistic perfection of its inhabited core. Creation of beauty in strength and of stability in loveliness was perhaps the ideal permeating the art of ancient town-builders. *Ramaṇīyatva* (charm) and *suguptatva* (safety) were the twin attributes of a model Tretā town (VII. 102. 8 ; 38. 17 ; II. 70. 1). It is precisely to underline this very aesthetic ideal of town-planning that our ancient cities are, not infrequently, compared with advantage to bedecked young damsels (V. 3. 18 ; 2. 21 ; 6. 21-2).

Then, the houses were never built in isolated spots (I. 5. 17 ; V. 53. 20). This indicates the fundamental nature of Aryan culture. Ancient Indians lived and moved in an organized manner and their residences were built in close propinquity, thus affording opportunities and advantages of a mutually beneficial corporate existence.

The principal thoroughfares were lined with trees, whose sanitary and aesthetic values are obvious. The provision of parks and pleasances, flowers and fruit-trees, lakes and lotus-ponds (V. 2. 8-14) is but an index to man's desire to remain in living contact with nature and to secure relief from the stuffiness and aridity of town life. From the aesthetic point of view, too, a tree or tower at the junction of roads is highly desirable. "The hazy vacuity of long, straight streets wearies the eyesight as there is nothing, in front, to fix the eye upon. Contrast with this the very pleasant effect which the street causes if it leads to some fine architectural structure or beautiful tree."[1]

The houses of uniform height, their homogeneous disposition along-side the streets and the harmony in their alignment and structure (I. 5. 19), provided equal facilities and advantages to the whole population in addition to satisfying the aesthetic needs of a civilized community. Similarly, the watering of roads and the provision of street-lights would indicate a civic sense which is lacking even today in many settlements. The reference to well-planned roads in the town clearly shows that a sense of proportion was also there.

In consonance with the attention devoted to town-planning, ancient India had developed a high tone of civic life. People held the city dear, as dear as their hearth and home, and collaborated in enhancing its beauty by ornamentation and decoration on festive occasions. Their deification of a city is but a compliment to the civic consciousness of the people. "There is nothing in all Indian literature of greater significance for the modern mind than the scene in which Hanumān contends in thr darkness with the woman who guards the gates, saying in muffled tones : 'I am the city of Laṅkā.' "[2] Rāvaṇa took great pride in dilating upon the incomparable beauty of his metropolis, Laṅkā, and repeatedly tempted Sītā with the amenities there (III. 48. 10-4). Sītā, therefore, rightly warned him by pointing out in particular the dismal prospect of a Laṅkā pining away like a widowed woman when its lord would be slain for his misdemeanour (V. 26. 22-6).

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[1] B. B. Dutt : *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[2] Sister Niveditā : *Civic and National Ideals*, p. 7.

The city was thus not a lifeless structure of dumb streets and mansions but a true companion of man, related to him by tangible bonds of affection and comfort. Even from his residence in Citrakūṭa. Rāma anxiously enquired of Bharata about the safety and prosperity of Ayodhyā, the hereditary seat of his forefathers (II. 100. 42). On his return from exile, Rāma asked Vaidehī to bow down to Ayodhyā (VI. 123. 52). Vālmīki seems to have taken great pride in glorifying it. As observed by Sister Niveditā : "Of our two great epics, it may be said that while the pervading interests of the Mahābhārata are heroic and national, those of the Rāmāyaṇa are personal and civic. It is more likely that Vālmīki's poem sprang out of a deliberate wish to glorify his beloved city of Ayodhyā by painting the mythic history of its first sovereign. The city, and everything in it, fills the poet with delight. He spends himself in the description of its beauty on great festivals. He loses himself in the thought of its palaces, its arches and its towers. But it is when he comes to paint Laṅkā that we reap the finest fruit of the civic sense which Ayodhyā has developed in him."[1]

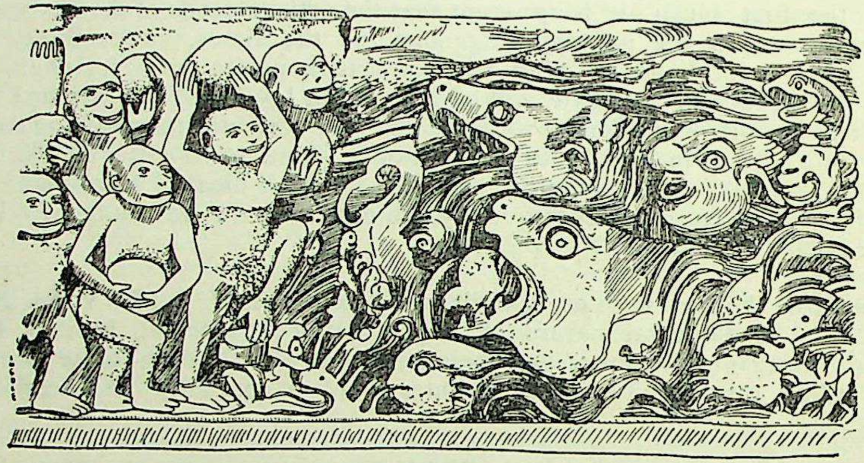

Fig. 98. Vānara army carrying blocks of rocks for building a bridge over the Ocean ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The kingdom was divided into two parts : the *pura* or metropolis and the *rāṣṭra* or *janapada*, the rest of the country. Villages were included in the *janapada* part of the country (II. 35. 34 ; I. 7. 14-5; 18. 45). The residents of the countryside were called *jānapadāḥ* (II. 14. 52). The countryside is frequently depicted as brimming with prosperity (VI. 125. 27 ; II. 49. 8). However, as already observed, the Rāmāyaṇa culture was largely urban and hence there are few occasions for depicting the rural economy of the age. The information on villages available from the epic is, accordingly, too scanty.

Even so—the villages were of three kinds : *grāmas* (II. 57. 4 ; 49. 3) agricultural, *mahāgrāmas* (IV. 40. 23) or corporate, and *ghoṣas* (II. 83. 15) or pastoral. The *paṭṭanas* (VI. 42. 14) were probably the smaller mofussil towns which must have been like emporia for the neighbouring villages. Residential quarters in the

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[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 6-7

grāmas were called *grāma-saṁvāsas* (II. 57. 4). Their compactness necessarily involved placement of arable land outside the village. The villagers, accordingly, had their fields on the outskirts.

Provincial towns, or *nagaras*, were surrounded by *grāmas* and *ghoṣas*. That is to say : the villages were not much isolated from one another or from the provincial towns or, for that matter, from the metropolis itself. They were connected by a net-work of roads and cross-roads which were used as chariot-roads. These roads promoted inland trade and communication, besides.

Close intercourse between the metropolis and the villages is indicated by the frequent description of the former as bristling with the countryfolk. In the assembly of Ayodhyā, there were representatives from the countryside as well (II. 1. 46). On the (proposed) initiation of Rāma, people from the countryside were present in the capital (II. 14. 52).

CHAPTER XXI

HERMIT CULTURE

The culture of hermitages stands only next in importance, to urban culture, in the Rāmāyaṇa. The location of these hermitages was in the *araṇya* or forest which, with its sombre woodland and quiet vicinage, was an ideal retreat for those who liked to live away from the turmoil of human habitation (II. 52. 98).

The hermitages or *āśramas* were built in convenient spots in the woods where the indispensable necessaries of life could be easily procured. Rāma asked Lakṣmaṇa to find out such a place in the Pañcavaṭī where they could dwell happily, some spot graced with the garniture of woods and delightful with liquid lapses, and whose neighbourhood yielded fuel, flowers, *kuśa* and water (III. 15. 4-5). Then, the spot selected should be *ekānta* (II. 54. 26) or *vivikta* (III. 13. 19), sufficiently sequestered from the constant ingress and egress of people from cities. Rāma rejected the proposal of putting up at the hemitage of Bharadvāja, since, because of its proximity to Ayodhyā, it would be frequently visited by people desirous of seeing him (II. 54. 24-5). It does not follow, however, that absolutely unpeopled tracts were sought after for ascetic establishments. On the other hand, the association of pious hermits was cherished. The first place where Rāma preferred to settle down in his forest sojourn was Citrakūṭa—a hill abounding in means of subsistence in the form of fruits and roots and hallowed by the presence of great ascetics (II. 56. 14-5). Its freedom from forest fires was an additional point. Cleanliness of the spot selected was insisted upon. The bank of some lake or river was generally preferred (I. 28. 18; 51. 23-4).

Branches of trees, bamboos, canes, ropes and grasses constituted the main material for constructing huts. An *āśrama* was usually a two-room habitation, the outer portion being known as *parṇakuṭī* and the inner one as *uṭaja* (II. 99. 4). An idea of "an ascetic's hut under its construction" can be had from Vālmīki's description of Rāma's *parṇaśālā* (fig. 99) at Pañcavaṭī put up by Lakṣmaṇa who, being a man of enormous strength, executed the entire job alone : "The hut was very spacious. The earth in it was levelled to make the ground-floor. The floor was spread with soft *kuśa* grass. The roof was supported by good pillars. The bamboo roof was spread over with *śamī* twigs and fastened with strong ropes and was, finally, stuffed and thatched with *kuśa*, *kāśa* and *śara* blades, and with leaves. It was beautiful to look at" (III. 15. 20-3).

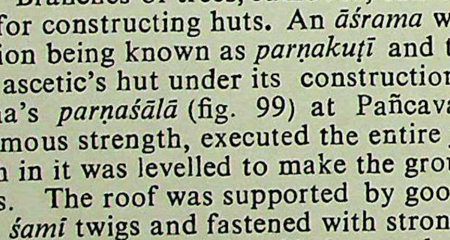

Fig. 99. Window with bars in a *parṇa-śālā* (or hut made of leaves and rushes); Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

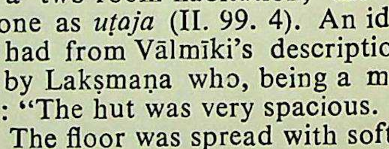

Fig. 100. Entrance, doors, boundary wall of *Kuti* or hut; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

A hermit colony comprising several huts (fig. 100) was known as an *āśrama-maṇḍala* (III. 1. 1) or a *tapovana* (VII. 47. 15). The asylums of the anchorites forming the colony were called *tāpasālayas* (II. 99. 4). Rāma's cottage at Citrakūṭa was among many similar ones. Of the different quarters in a hermitage, the most important was the *agni-śaraṇa* (III. 1. 4; 12. 5) or *agni-śālā* (II. 91. 11). It was the *sanctum sanctorum* of the hearth and home of the hermits. It was a spacious chamber housing the sacrificial fire. The *vedī* or sacrificial dais used to be spacious (*viśāla*, III. 1. 4) and inclined to the north-east (II. 99. 24). A room was set apart for guests (III. 1. 15). When Rāma visited the hermitage of Bharadvāja, the sage duly welcomed him and allotted him suitable quarters (II. 54. 18). Separate places were set apart for the worship of the gods, the *caityas* and the daises for offering oblations. The assignment of quarters for different purposes was usual (II. 56. 33-4). The courtyards were maintained clean and well-swept (III. 1. 3).

The patriarch (ascetic), who acted as the head of such a colony, was an august, venerable saint, known as *kulapati* (II. 116. 4). The famous *kulapatis* of the period were Vālmīki, Agastya, Bharadvāja, etc. Under their spiritual guidance resided a host of disciples and recluses who had retired from society to escape worldly temptations and had devoted themselves to religious duties.

The forests, which sheltered hermits, were doubtless infested with wild animals (II. 119. 19; 98. 13). Ferocious beasts used to attack those ascetics who happened to be unclean or heedless. Strangely enough, forests are described as *durga* (fort), difficult of traversing, for through these ran foot-tracks made by the sages for their daily fruit-gathering (II. 119. 20-1). These tracks were the only outlets through the impenetrable jungle. It was customary for the hermits to mark the trees leading to their asylums with *kuśa* and bark as a convenient means of locating their position at odd hours. When Bharata visited Rāma at Citrakūṭa, he espied the bark pieces set up by Lakṣmaṇa high up on the trees to serve as guide-posts (II. 99. 6, 10).

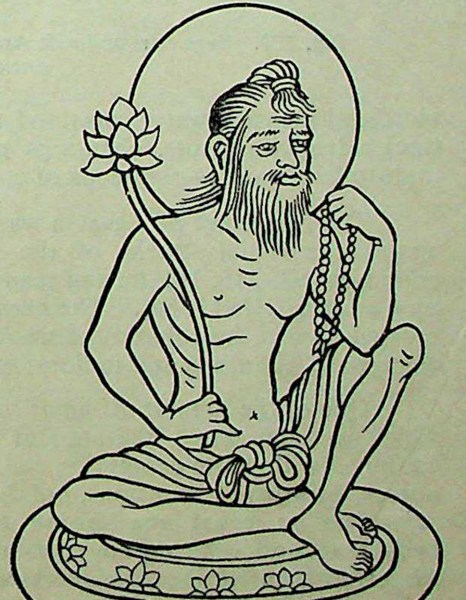

Fig. 101. Vasiṣṭha; *c.* eighth century A.D (R K. Mookerjee's *Ancient Indian Education*).

During the early epic period, there was a long stretch of hutments from the banks of the Sarayū (in Kosala) down to the banks of the Godāvarī. Some of the well-known sites, where the ascetic habitations were concentrated, were Daṇḍakāraṇya (III. 1. 1), banks of Narmadā (VII. 32. 1) and Gaṅgā (VII. 47. 15), and Citrakūṭa (II. 56. 14). The renowned hermitages of the day were those of—Agastya (III. 11), Vasiṣṭha (I. 51. 23 8; fig. 101), Arti (II. 117. 5; fig. 102), Śarabhaṅga (III. 5. 3), Vālmīki (VII. 49; fig. 2). Bharadvāja (II. 90; fig. 103), Gautama (I. 48), Sutīkṣṇa (III. 7. 22) and Śabarī (III. 74), and the Siddhāśrama of Viṣṇu (I. 29) and the Kāmāśrama of Śiva (I. 23. 15, 22).

Janasthāna was the famous hermit colony of the day, where Rāma passed the major period of his exile. The colony presented a picturesque sight with coats of bark hanging around, the ground bespread with *kuśa*, well-swept courtyards, the deer reclining in the shade, birds nestling in the branches of trees spacious sheds for fire worship posited with

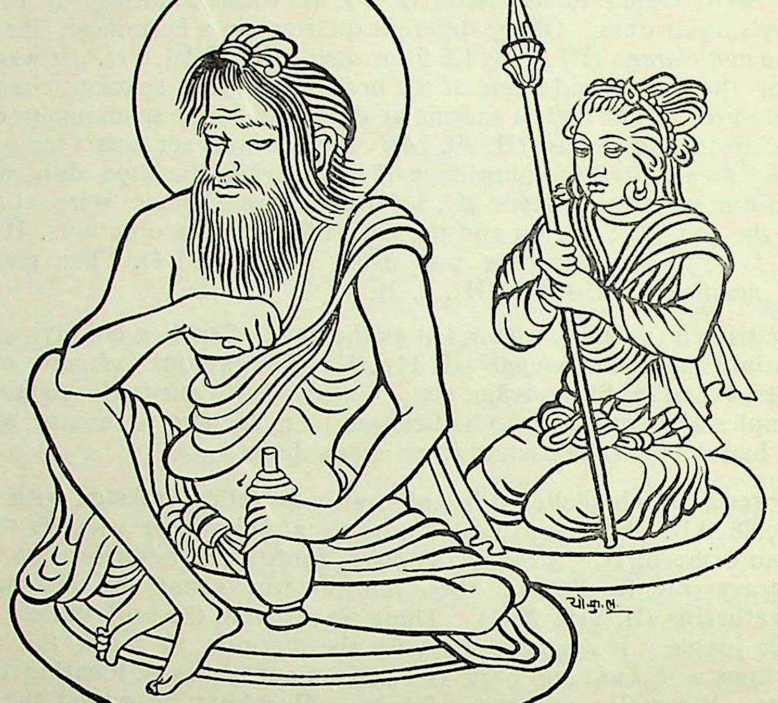

Fig. 102. Sage Atri and wife Anasūyā ; *c.* eighth century A.D. (R. K. Mookerjee's *Ancient Indian Education*).

sacrificial utensils, water cans and offerings, antelope-skins and sacrificial fuel, tall trees laden with fruits, chantings of the Vedas, a lovely lotus pond nearby and a multitude of saints—righteous of conduct, busy with self-realization (III. 1. 1-9).

The hermitage of Agastya was a tower of strength for the ascetics--and a haven against the bestial attacks of the night-rangers. The sage is known as an early colonizer (VI. 115. 14), having rendered the place impregnable by killing demons by his *tapas* (III. 11. 54). The hermitage was marked by heaps of firewood and pressed *darbha*, by columns of smoke rising from the sacrificial fire, and by *dvijas* engaged in ablutions and in floral worship (III. 11. 50-2).

One of the biggest *āśramas* of the time was that of Bharadvāja at Prayāga which accommodated Bharata and his retinue including ladies. The *āśrama* was equipped with white *catuḥśālās*, stalls which accommodated the royal elephants and horses, *harmyas* or mansions, *prāsādas* or palaces with *toraṇas* or gateways, a separate *rājaveśma* or royal guest-house fitted with several *toraṇas* and furnished with beds, seats and vehicles, coverlets and carpets and stores of food (II. 91. 32-5). The *āśrama* also entertained the guests with music and dance. All this lavishness was improvised for the occasion, showing the resources which the *ṛṣi* could command from his locality.[1]

Hermitages are described as "begirt with the energy derived from *brāhma* lore"

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[1] R. K. Mookerjee : *Ancient Indian Education*, p. 334 (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London).

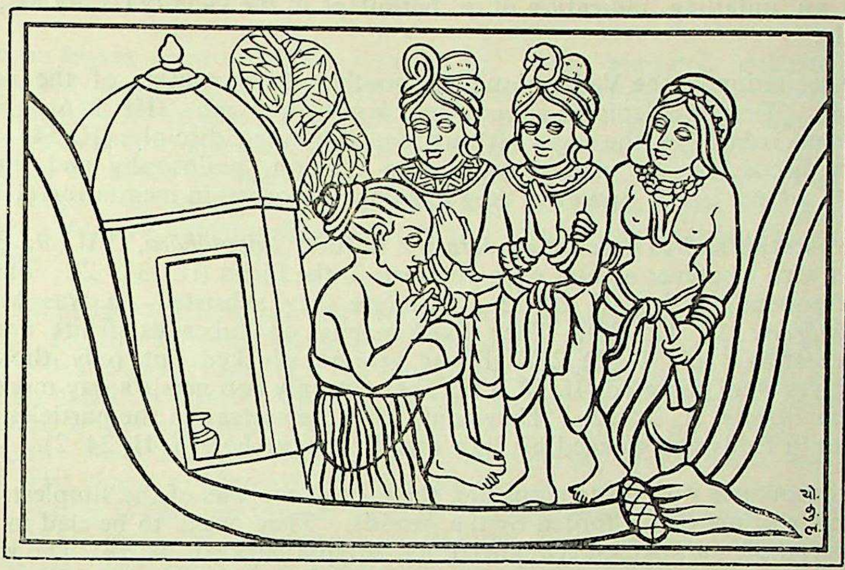

Fig. 103. (Supposed by Cunningham to be) the hermitage of sage Bharadvāja at Prayāga, or of Atri at Citrakūṭa ; *c.* second century B.C. (R. K. Mookerjee's *Ancient Indian Education*).

(III. 11. 21). Proper decorum and gravity of behaviour was to be maintained in the sanction. Frivolous or casual attitude was discouraged (III. 62. 6). When Rāma entered the monastic area of Atri's *āśrama*, he is said to have unstrung his bow (III. 1. 9-10). Similarly, Bharata went to see Bharadvāja on foot with his chaplain and ministers only, leaving the rest of the party, and their martial outfit, a *krośa* away (II. 90. 1-2).

The pious atmosphere of the hermitages naturally prompted one to desist from untruth and other weaknesses of the body and mind (III. 17. 14). The spiritual potency of Agastya rendered his hermitage inhospitable to persons given to falsehood, cruelty, craftiness, wickedness or unrighteousness of any sort (III. 11. 90). No wonder if such centres of piety and godliness became cradles of civilization and learning in ancient India.

Vanavāsa (II. 28.5) or ascetic life in the woods was beset with innumerable hardships. The daily life of the ascetics was largely occupied with the performance of various religious rites and rigorous routine. They took their bath three times a day (II. 28. 15). Early in the morning, the *ṛṣis*, after their bath, engaged in chanting the holy *mantras* (I. 23. 17). The sight of hosts of *ṛṣis* performing their ablutions in rivers and adoring the sun with jars full of water, and then wending their way home in a body, full pitchers on their shoulders, their barks drenched in water (II. 119. 5), was frequent and edifying.

Ascetics had to observe the rules of their order by adoring the deities and the manes, performing the rites of hospitality and offering presents of flowers, collected by themselves, on the altar (II. 28. 13-4, 16). In Agastya's *āśrama*, Rāma saw the *dvijas*, fresh from ablutions in sacred and isolated bathing places, offering flowers (III. 11. 52). The anchorites performed *agnihotra* and all the various kinds of sacrifice prescribed by the scriptures. The oblations offered were of two kinds : *bali* or offerings to the spirits of the air, and *homa* or clarified butter poured into the sacred fire as an offering to the gods to the accompaniment of prayers and invocations (III. 1. 6). The sight of a dense column of smoke arising from the sacrificial fires was an unfailing indication of a hermitage in the vicinity (II. 99 12 ; 119. 6 ; III. 11. 51).

The recitation of the Vedas aloud was another daily routine of the asramites (VI. 35. 19). They are depicted as reverberating with hymns (III. 1. 6). Finishing *agnihotra* and *svādhyāya*, the sages sat surrounded by their disciples (II. 54. 11-2) and carried on discussions on matters concerning religion, philosophy and mythology (II. 54. 34). On a *parva*, however, they remained absorbed in meditation (III. 38. 4).

The ascetics had to practise moderation in food (*niyatāhāra*, VII. 9. 39), and be content with whatever edibles were obtained in the forest (II. 37. 2). They were required frequently to fast (II. 28. 13). The fare they subsisted on was known as *vanyam āhāram* (II 12. 97). They lived mainly on tuberous fruits and roots, avoiding meat as a rule (II. 20 29). Fruits were not plucked but only those fallen by themselves were gathered (II. 28. 12). They ate only two meals a day morning and evening (*ahorātram*, II. 28. 12). They could help themselves to the particles of grain lying about in fields and gleaned by their own hands (*uñchavṛtti*, II. 24. 2).

In consonance with abstemious life, their dress too was of the simplest, sparest quality, made of material afforded by the woods. They used to be clad in fibres of *kuśa* grass (II. 50. 44), black-deer skin (II. 99. 26) and bark (II. 28. 13). The *valkala* or bark served the purpose of the upper garment (II. 95. 6), the deer skin being evidently used as a lower garment whose colour was usually orange (II. 12. 98). On the head, *jaṭās*, or matted locks, were kept (II. 28. 13).

The ascetics got their supply of fuel by hewing wood from the neighbouring trees (II. 54. 7), which they chopped and heaped up in front of their cottages. They burned dry dung of deer and buffaloes to prevent cold (II. 99. 5, 7). We can get an idea of the stock of household property owned and used by the hermits from the variety of presents made to Kuśa and Lava by the sages in Vālmīki's hermitage when they were pleased with their recitation of the Rāmāyaṇa (I. 4. 20-5). They included : *bṛsī* (seat made of *uduṁvara* wood ; the seat of *darbha* grass was known as *viṣṭa*) ; *cīra* (plaited grass), *jaṭābandhana* (thread for tying up the matted locks), *kalaśa* (pitcher), *kṛṣṇājina* (black-deer skin), *kamaṇḍalu* (water-pot, earthen or wooden), *kaupīna* (lower underwear), *kuṭhāra* (axe), *kāṣāya* (ochre cloth). *kāṣṭha-rajju* (twine for binding faggots with), *kāṣṭha-bhāra* (fuel load), *mauñjī* (a girdle of *muñja* grass), *valkala* (bark garment), *yojña-sūtra* (holy thread) and *yajña-bhāṇḍa* (sacrificial utensils).

Performance of penance (II 28. 24) was the main objective that led these anchorites to seek the calm solitude of the forest. The austerities consisted of various methods of self-mortification, self-restraint and self-denial, undertaken with a view to purging oneself of all sinfulness. During penance, the ascetics were required to be studiously intent on piety, on study of the Vedas, on moderation in meals and on the control of senses, on righteousness, on firmness in honesty, absorption in meditation, and observation of purity in conduct. Success in penance was also associated with particular sacred spots. Citrakūṭa was eminently suited for penance since innumerable saints were reputed to have attained *nirvāṇa* through austerities practised *there* (II. 54. 31). A mere beholding of its peaks led to one's welfare and freedom from ignorance (II. 54. 30).

During his visit to Janasthāna, Rāma met ascetics engaged in multifarious austerities. Some subsisted only on raw food pounded between stones ; some, like good Samaritans, had no leisure to themselves or for indolence ; some others used no bed for reposing ; some lived under the open sky ; some wore clothes unwrenched and dripping. Then, there were some who used their teeth for a regular mortar ; some subsisted on leaves, some on water, some on air. Some were ever engaged in muttering *mantras*; some lived at high altitudes; some dipped into water (up to the neck) and remained so for days on end, while others practised *pancāgni tapas* by sitting amid fire on their four sides and the burning sun for the fifth (III. 6. 2-5). The ascetics were all noted for august peacefulness that comes to men of *yoga*, that is steadfastness, perfect mental poise, concentrated meditation and by living in the spirit (III. 6. 6). Hanumān refers to a *vṛkṣa-mūlika* living immorable under a tree (V. 13. 38).

The Rāmāyaṇa frequently mentions an order of ascetics going by the name of *śramaṇas*. At the Putreṣṭi sacrifice of Daśaratha, *śramaṇas* were sumptuously fed along with Brāhmaṇas (I. 14. 12). In the Araṇyakāṇḍa, Kabandha tells Rāma of a *śramaṇī*, by name, Śabarī (III. 73. 26). In the course of his altercation with Vālī, Rāma refers to the punishment of an unrighteous *śramaṇa* by his ancestor, Māndhatā (IV. 18. 33). Now, the term *śramaṇa* is usually interpreted by some commentators as a Buddhist *bhikṣu* or *kṣapaṇaka*.[1] But the *śramaṇas* were not exclusively Buddhist priests. Earlier *Brāhmaṇas* use the word in a sense which precludes this meaning. There is definite proof of the *śramaṇa* existing as a social feature before the advent of Buddhism. The word first occurs in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* (IV. 3. 22). Moreover, Vālmīki condemns the Cārvākas in no uncertain terms, and if *śramaṇas* were Buddhists who rejected Veda and ridiculed Vedic rites, it is impossible that he would have honoured them at a Vedic sacrifice and considered them deserving of *svarga* (III. 74. 33). Śabarī burns herself to death (III. 74 32)—a practice which is often alluded to in the literature of the Brāhmaṇas as having been observed by them. It does not appear that the Buddhists ever observed the practice. Hence the *śramaṇas* mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa may safely be included in a Vedic (ascetic) order. They styled themselves as such in order to distinguish themselves from the ascetics (*tāpasas*) who practised penance and sacrifice in the woods, as well as from the Brāhmaṇas who were householders.[2]

Again, Vālmīki belies the supposition that female ascetics were found in India only after Buddha's time. The Bālakāṇḍa relates several legends of women performing penance. Anasūyā, wife of Atri, is said to have practised austerities for several years (II. 117. 11). She was a pious ascetic famed in her day for her work in relieving peoples' distress caused by famines and droughts (II. 117. 9-12). There were certain women who embraced the ascetic order for life, shunning all worldly attachments, and never returned to household life. To this category belonged Śabarī (III. 74. 7) and Svayaṁprabhā (IV. 50. 38). They were known as *tāpasī* (V. 15. 31) and *śramaṇī* (II. 38. 4), respectively. They wore deer skins, matted locks and bark garments (IV. 50. 38), kept their senses restrained (V. 15. 31), practised righteousness, engaged themselves in the welfare of all creatures (IV. 51 9-10) and shone with spiritual lustre (IV. 50. 39). Śabarī was ever engaged in pious observances (III. 73. 27). By virtue of her devout meditation, it is believed, she attained to holy regions after she gave herself up to fire (III. 74. 32, 35).

The ascetics leading the *vānaprastha* mode of life were accompanied by thei wives (II. 30. 30). There are also several legends in which maidens were conferr on these *brahmacārins*. Sometimes the maidens themselves sought to be the wives holy youth.

Two or more ascetics keeping liaison with one woman were condemne

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1. Tilaka com. on I. 14. 12 and Govindarāja com. on IV. 18. 33.
2. See Barua · *Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy*, pp. 239-40 cited in Ratilal Mehta : *Asceti- Pre-Buddhist Days* (*Indian Culture*, iii, p. 572) ; Narayana Aiyangar : *Śramaṇas* (*Indian An* May 1881, p. 143).

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bringing disgrace upon the order (III. 2. 11-2). Adulterous monks would be severely punished by the king (IV. 18. 33). Sexual aberration was the most formidable impediment to one's progress up the steps of spirituality. The Bālakāṇḍa relates several legends of sages who, befooled by the witcheries of *kāma* (I. 64. 1), became oblivious of their exalted station in life and suffered a downfall. Gods like Indra, who otherwise stood in great fear of the might of asceticism, struck precisely at this infirmity of sages—their weakness for the fair sex—by sending out glamorous nymphs to dislodge them from their dread pedestal of power and repute. Viśvāmitra baited by Menakā is a classic instance of how ascetics of seasoned penance, when duped and blinded by the wiles of enchantresses, threw all their gains to the winds by courting dissipation. It was only after the grievous error had been committed that their eyes opened in anguish and repentance...to the prospect of having to start their career all over again (cf. I. 63. 3-14).

Cursing was another common vice among sages. The irascibility of the *ṛṣis* of old was proverbial. Agastya, Vasiṣṭha, Gautama, Durvāsā, Viśvāmitra—were all given to cursing people for breaches of good conduct.[1] The efficacy of the curse depended on the ascetic's spiritual power. But it has been emphasized time and again in the epic that cursing or bursting into a rage tends to detract from one's ascension to worlds of spirit and gives a setback to one's progress in self-discipline. Viśvāmitra realized a definite deterioration in his ascetic merit after he had cursed Rambhā (I. 64. 16). It was this very apprehension of the loss of their merit that accounted for the sages' reluctance to exterminate the Rākṣasas who frequently disturbed their sacrifices.

The above account of ascetic culture should not, however, lead to the impression that there was a sort of watertight barrier between the city and the hermitage. On the contrary, sufficient intercourse existed between the two to enable sylvan bowers to exert their edifying influence on urban culture. Visits from the *āśrama*-settlements to royal courts, and by kings to *gurukulas* are frequently described in the epic. Vālmīki was a great friend of Daśaratha (VII. 47. 16-7). Hermits were sumptuously fed at Daśaratha's sacrifice (I. 14. 12). Rāma's life as a ruling monarch, as described in the Uttarakāṇḍa, was lived in active association with sages who, later, sought his hospitality at Ayodhyā more than once.

A study of the welcome enquiries with which kings and hermits used to greet one another gives an insight into the spirit of co-operation and affection informing their relationship. The kings enquired about the well-being of the sages' penance, fire-worship and disciples (I. 52. 4). And rightly so. For, being the protectors of the realm, the kings were responsible for the safe conduct of the rituals of the ascetics, and their enquiries furnish a proof of their solicitude for the weal of the hermit order and of their readiness to take up arms in defence of holy life. The hermits themselves, being novices in military arts (*raṇakarmasu akuśalāḥ*, IV. 11. 17), often sought royal aid when they feared disturbance in their pieties (III. 38. 4-5). Rāma's life, not only during his exile but also before and after it, is replete with instances of such succour willingly rendered. For their part, the forest-dwellers would make enquiries about the army, the treasury and the welfare of the king and his subjects I. 52. 9), thereby showing that they were not wanting in interest in the material rosperity of the kingdom. Being custodians of spiritual heritage of the land, they d the right to know if the rulers were engaged in the proper discharge of their *arma* or obligation by equitably administering the country (I. 52. 7). The ascetic's tribution to the welfare of the community was silent, but no less valuable than king's. The training of the young—especially princes—was fittingly undertaken these men of sublime example and love universal.

II. 11. 64, 66; I. 48. 27, 29; 59. 17-22; 62. 17-8; 64. 11.

In the end, services rendered by our sages, as advance guards of Brahmanic culture, in non-Aryan regions of the country, and abroad must be emphasized. They were not mere passive, inert thinkers, but were active propagators of their faith. The Aryan States were surrounded by a belt of forests inhabited by cannibals. Sages like Agastya chose to betake themselves to such wilds for completing the final stages of their penance. Naturally, they interfered with the aboriginal denizens of the forests; complaints about whose maltreatment were duly conveyed to their kings (III. 10. 11). And, under cover of securing the safety of the Brāhmaṇa hermits, was carried on the momentous work of clearing the jungles of the savages resulting in the progressive enlargement of the Aryan "pale."[1]

Even within the Aryan "pale," it was the sages who kept alive the Brahmanic culture, irrespective of political boundaries. The sages, in fact, did not belong to any particular State; they were honoured and respected by all, and received visitors from all parts of the country, and they, in turn, travelled from place to place, visiting kings and holding religious discourses at their courts. The sages were thus a potent unifying force which maintained harmony and integrity in our culture throughout the conglomeration—of States that comprised the India of the early epic period.

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[1] Nagendranath Ghose : *The Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata — A Sociological Study* (*Sir Asutosh Mookerjee Silver Jubilee Volumes*, vol iii, *Orientalia*, part ii, p. 386).

CHAPTER XXII

RITES AND RITUALS

Religion has always played a dominant role in India and it informed every sphere of the life of ancient Indians. Vālmīki in his epic furnishes rich data in support of this opinion. Notwithstanding the pomp and magnificence, the art and luxury, the drink and dalliance prevalent in the prosperous and merry society of the times, religion asserted itself at every step. The reader is furnished with endless allusions to the spiritual outlook and religious character of the people.

The Vedas had come to occupy a highly sacred position immune from the petty attacks of logic. Jaṭāyu told Rāvaṇa : "As it is not easy to destroy by reasonings of logic Śruti containing eternal and immutable truths, even so you will not be able to carry off Vaidehī so long as I live" (III. 50. 22). The Veda continued to exercise a vital influence on the rituals and ceremonies of the people. Celebration of any particular rite, in strict consonance with the formula enunciated in the Vedas (II. 56. 33), was held as proof positive of its faultless performance. Vālmīki frequently describes rites being performed "according to ordinance" (II. 76. 13 ; 56. 32) and "as laid down in the scriptures" (II. 52. 79 ; III. 68. 36). Rāma is depicted as consecrating his shaft in accordance with the *mantras* laid down in the Vedas (VI. 108. 14). Vedic *mantras* were invariably recited in all rituals and ceremonies. The poet praises human intellect following the Scripture, and one of Bharata's many oaths before Kausalyā is that purity of intellect may never dawn on him if he was an accomplice in the sin of Rāma's exile (II. 75. 21).

A number of auspicious and propitiatory rites were observed universally. When a new house was constructed, the *vāstu-śānti* (appeasement of the site) was performed in honour of the presiding deity. It was intended for pacification of the hostile spirit(s) abiding in the place (*vāstu-śamana*) and also for long life of the new occupant (II. 56. 22). A description is given of the performance of this rite by Rāma before settling down in his newly constructed cottage at Citrakūṭa : "Rāma asked Lakṣmaṇa quickly to get ready some roasted venison for offering to the *vāstu-devatā*, as he was anxious not to miss the auspicious time for offering sacrifices and entering the newly erected residence. When the black deer with all its parts was well-roasted, hot and free from blood, Rāma performed his ablutions and, drawing in his senses, recited all the *mantras* enjoined for performing a sacrifice. Then, having in a pure spirit communed with all the deities, and worshipped the spirits (*bhūtas*) with sylvan wreaths, fruits, roots, meat cooked according to prescription, water, *japa*, grass and faggots, Rāma along with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa entered the graceful cottage. Inside the house he made offering of the mass of cooked food with *mantras*, invoking the gods Vaiśvadevas, Viṣṇu and Rudra, and performed further ceremonies for removing malign influences from the abode. He duly performed *japa* and ablutions in consonance with the ordinance and made an excellent sacrifice—a kind of expiation ritual" (II. 56. 22-32).

It is culturally significant that the *vāstu-śamana* would make the home of the Hindu *gṛhastha* not a lifeless structure of brick and mortar, a dwelling place not of the members of the family but also of the gods, the manes and spirits, all existing under the care and blessing of Agni, god of fire, the presiding deity of the home.

Another interesting rite was the *āgrāyaṇa*, which was the ceremony of partaking of the first fruits of the harvest. It was performed at the end of autumn, after the harvesting, in order to propitiate the gods and the manes (III. 16. 6). It corresponds to the *āgrāyaṇeṣṭi* of the *śrauta* literature. Details of this rite are not given in the epic. An explanation of this practice is that people considered it improper to enjoy the first grains without offering them to the gods, whose bounty supplies the world with the necessaries of life.

Whenever an individual set about some momentous task, a *svastyayana* or benediction rite was performed to ensure his happiness and success. When Rāma departed to the forest with Viśvāmitra, his parents performed this ceremony : the *purohita* (Vasiṣṭha) blessing him with *mantras* (I. 22. 2). *Svastivācana* was a rite preparatory to any important ceremony in which the Brāhmaṇas spread boiled rice on the ground and invoked blessings of gods on the rites about to commence. On the morning of his proposed coronation, Rāma got performed *svastivācana* by his priests (II. 6. 7). When he departed to the forest, an elaborate *svastivācana* was conducted by his mother Kausalyā for his safety and well-being during exile. Vālmīki devotes a whole canto to its description (II. 25).

Morning was set apart for the performance of rites known as *āhnika* (I. 23. 2; 31. 2; 35. 3). They are also spoken of as *paurvāhṇika* (I. 35. 3; III. 17. 2), *i.e.*, rites to be performed before the advent of the day. These included *snāna* or bath, *arghya*, *tarpaṇa* and *mārjana* or the offering of libations to the sun-god and the manes ; *prāṇāyāma* or the practice of breath-control ; *japa* or the chanting of *sāvitrī*; *homa* or fire-worship, and *devatārcā* or worship of the gods.[1] Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa used to perform their morning rites duly while with Viśvāmitra (I. 24. 1; 31. 1; 35. 3). After passing the night at the *āśrama* of Sutīkṣṇa, Rāma is described as waking up at dawn, sipping water, completing his ablutions and *sandhyā*, and worshipping the fire and the gods ritually aright (III. 8. 2-3). While at Pañcavaṭī, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa used to bathe every day in the river Godāvarī and perform their morning services in the hermitage (III. 17. 1-2). The sages in Viśvāmitra's company, having bathed and duly offered oblations of water to the gods and the manes, performed *agnihotra* sacrifice with clarified butter, sat down round the august sage to listen to the story of the Gaṅgā's origin (I. 35. 8-9). King Janaka attended to his normal business only after completing his morning rites (I. 70. 1).

Sandhyā was the most important of all the *āhnika* duties and was to be performed by all *dvija*. There are frequent references to the performance of *sandhyā* in the Rāmāyaṇa. Particular stress is laid on performing the rite at the appointed time (VII. 81. 21). Viśvāmitra is often found urging Rāma, who accompanied him to his hermitage, to perform *sandhyā* in time (I. 23. 2). Its main feature is adoring the sun-god with offerings of water and hummings of *gāyatrī* (I. 23. 3). It is performed in the morning facing east and before sunrise (I. 23. 2), and in the evening facing west before sunset (VII. 82. 2). Whether at home or on a journey, the ancient Aryans never failed to perform *sandhyā*. On the day of his proposed installation, Rāma woke up, while a watch yet remained for the night to close, performed his morning *sandhyā*, east-faced, and did his *japa* with a calm mind (II. 6. 5-6). Rāma never missed his *sandhyā* throughout his exile, and on the shore of the Laṅkā sea ; even when overwhelmed with sorrow for Sītā, he duly performed it (VI. 5. 23).

There is evidence that women, too, performed the *sandhyā* rites as regularly as men. Guha, the king of the Niṣādas, told Bharata how the three—Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā—had performed their *sandhyā* at Śṛṅgaverapura on their way to Citrakūṭa (II. 87. 19). Hanumān, searching for Sītā in Laṅkā, thought of waiting for her on the bank of a river, as he felt that Sītā would surely turn up there in the evening for performing *sandhyā* (V. 14. 49).

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[1] I. 23. 2-4, 17 ; 35. 8-9 ; II. 6. 6-7 ; 105. 2 ; 4. 33 ; III. 8. 2-3.

Agnihotra, or the worship of fire, was a rite universally observed, like *sandhyā*, both morning and evening. The ancient Aryans regarded fire with reverence for it played an important role in all their social and religious engagements. *Agnihotra* was performed in a special chamber—the *agnyāgāra* (II. 32. 2)—set apart for the purpose where fire was kept burning perpetually (VII. 24. 10). A Brāhmana, who kept alive prepetually a sacred fire in his family, was known as an *āhitāgni*. Jaṭāyu, when fatally wounded by Rāvaṇa, was blest by Rāma to attain to that state of existence usually reached by *āhitāgnis* (III. 68. 29-30). In Ayodhyā, there was none who did not perform his daily *agnihotra* (I. 6. 12) ; even Laṅka is said to have been filled with people worshipping the fire (VI. 57. 21).

During their rambles with Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa took their bath and offered oblations into the fire at sunset, which alludes to the practice of evening *agnihotra* (I. 31. 20). On the eve of his proposed coronation, Rāma is said to have performed *agnihotra* along with Sītā (II. 6. 2-3). Kausalyā also performed on elaborate *agnihotra* on the day Rāma was to depart to the forest (II. 25. 26-8).

Prayers to the gods formed an inseparable part of the daily life of the people. They remembered the gods and prayed to them for the fulfilment of their desired objects. They lived in daily communion, as it were, with the gods. The gods were not looked upon as beings beyond the ken of human comprehension or too august for approach and supplication, but as beings who permeated the life of mortals with benign influence and to whom men looked up for succour when in distress.

Worship of gods (*deva-kārya*, II. 20. 17) was a common feature of the religious life of the people. Men and women of Ayodhyā, young or old, are described as making obeisance to the gods both morning and evening for the welfare of Rāma as *yuvarāja* (II. 2. 51-2). The citizens of the capital, on being apprised by Daśaratha of his intention to instal Rāma on the throne, are said to have returned home and worshipped the gods with delighted minds to express their gratefulness to the Powers on high (II. 3. 49). Sītā, having performed the worship of gods, is described as anxiously awaiting the return of Rāma after his coronation (II. 26. 4). She saluted the gods before the fire at Laṅkā (VI. 116. 24) Bharata found in Ayodhyā, mourning the death of Daśaratha and the exile of Rāma, the cessation of the worship of gods in the temples (II. 71. 40). In a kingless country, persons with intent hearts were not to offer garlands, sweets and *dakṣiṇā* to the gods. (II. 67. 27).

Worship of gods was open to, and quite common among, women. When Kausalyā learnt of the imminent *yauvarājya* ceremony of Rāma, she is said to have worshipped Janārdana by performing *prāṇāyāma* and meditating with closed eyes upon the deity (II. 4. 32-3). The fact that Rāma saluted the deities presiding over the city of Ayodhyā indicates belief in the existence of *grāma-devatās* (II. 50. 2). Kaikeyī's reference to *gṛha-devatās* in every household (II. 11. 15) points to the prevalence of the worship of tutelaring.

The gateways of the city and palaces of Ayodhyā, as also the cross-roads (*catvaras*). were worshipped with sandal, garlands and incense (II. 3. 14). The weapons of warriors were discharged only after propitiating the presiding deities (VI. 73. 24). Janaka's bow was worshipped with *aguru*, *dhūpa* and other kinds of incense (I. 31. 13).

There are frequent references to temples dedicated to the gods. Vālmīki tells how the citizens began to adorn the bright and fair domes of the temples with banners and buntings to celebrate Rāma's coronation (II. 6. 11-3). Fragrant blossoms sprinkled over boiled rice and other edibles and *dakṣiṇās* were placed in the abodes of the gods, and in the *caityas* (II. 3. 19). The doors of the temples were painted white (II. 7. 4). On the eve of the coronation, Rāma is said to have slept in the temple of Viṣṇu (II. 6. 4). Kausalyā in clear terms refers to the existence of temples when she blesses Rāma, going on exile, when she says: "Let the deities whom you worship every day in the temples protect you in the forest" (II. 25. 4). At Citrakūṭa, Rāma did not forget to enquire about the temples of Ayodhyā (II. 100. 43). The temples referred to here might be taken for public places of worship which were the common property of the citizens, and in whose maintenance and adornment they took active interest. Nevertheless, there were others privately owned and maintained. When the newly married brides of the Ikṣvāku princes returned to Ayodhyā from Mithilā, they are said to have worshipped at Temples (I. 77. 13). Since this description relates to the time when the brides had entered the palaces of their husbands, it can be presumed that the said sanctuary was situated within the precincts of the palaces. The temple of Viṣṇu, where Rāma slept, the day before his coronation, was also evidently situated within the palace. Again, since Kausalyā performed the whole ceremony of the worship of gods at her own residence (II. 20. 14-20), it is clear that in every household there was a sacred corner dedicated to worship. The hermitage of Agastya consisted of grottos dedicated to various deities (III. 12 17-20). It was customary to circumambulate temples (starting from the right-side) falling on one's way (II. 17. 16).

It would be pertinent to discuss in this connection the connotation of the term *caitya* which finds repeated mention in the poem. Rāma on his way to the forest is said to have passed through the Kosala country which was studded with *caityas* and *yūpas* (II. 50. 10). *Caityas* are often mentioned along with *devāyatanas* (temples). When Bharata was brought back from his uncle's to Ayodhyā, he found that the birds (that had built their nests) in *devāyatanas* and *caityas* were not lively (II. 71. 42). Daśaratha ordered food with *dakṣiṇā* to be kept ready for Rāma's coronation in *devāyatanas* and *caityas*. Hanumān is said to have searched for Sītā in *caitya* houses at Laṅkā (V. 12. 15, 17). In Rāvaṇa's Aśoka grove, Hanumān saw a *caitya-prāsāda* which had a thousand pillars and was very high (V. 15. 16). Rāvaṇa, though wearing ornaments, is described to be fearful like the *caityas* of the burning-*ghāṭ* (V. 22. 29).

Following are some of the usages in which the word *caitya* is understood by the commentators: (*i*) Road-side trees (*rathyā-vṛkṣa*, II 3. 18), (*ii*) crossways (*catuṣpatha*, II. 3. 18), (*iii*) temples of village deities (*grāma-devatā-sthāna*, II 17. 16), (*iv*) trees that are the abodes of deities (*devata-niṣṭhāna-vṛkṣa*, II. 50. 8), (*v*) temples dedicated to gods (*devatāyatana*, II. 50. 8), (*vi*) places where the *cayana* ceremony was performed at the completion of the Aśvamedha sacrifice (*aśvamedhānta-yāgāneka-cayana-pradeśa*, II. 100. 43), (*vii*) Bauddha temples (*bauddhāyatanāni*, V. 2. 15) or a rounded Bauddha temple (*caityam vartulākāratvat bauddhāyatanam iva*, V. 12. 16), (*viii*) halls at crossways (*catuṣpatha-maṇḍapa*, V. 12. 15), (*ix*) trees on crossways (*catuṣpatha-varti vṛkṣa*, V. 12. 18) which had revetments round their stems, and (*x*) a mound or tree raised on the burning-*ghāṭ* (*śmaśāna-vṛkṣa* or *śmaśāna-maṇḍapa*, V. 22. 29).

Commentators have thus widely differed as to the exact connotation of the term *caitya*. The *caitya* of the Rāmāyaṇa cannot be correctly construed as a Bauddha temple. It is worth noting that the commentators are not consistent in interpreting the word as such. Oddly enough they seem to construe the word to mean a

Brahmanical building when it is mentioned in connection with Rāma and his country, and a Buddhist building when mentioned in connection with the enemy's country, ignoring the fact that Vālmīki has peopled Laṅkā with Vedic reciters and sacrificers without ever mentioning the Buddhists. Moreover, *caityas* were known long before Buddha—as connected with the Brahmanical sacrifices. The word *caitya* is derived from the root *ci*, to inter (cement), and the commentary *Gurubālaprabodhikā* on the *Amarakośa* says that it denotes a building because it is the result of a cementing together of stones, *etc.* (*cīyate pāṣāṇādinā iti caityam*). Again, since the ceremony performed at the end of sacrifices is called *cayana*, *i.e.*, collection of sacred ashes and other relics, so *caitya* might refer to the place where the *cayana* ceremony is performed.

Sometimes the epic refers to *caitya* trees (V. 22. 29) which were so called because, instead of constructing a building, it was also the custom to plant trees with revetments round their stems where the *cayana* ceremony was performed. In course of time, all revetted trees began to be called *caitya* trees.

The likeness of Rāvaṇa to a *śmaśāna-caitya* (V. 22. 29) shows that monumental buildings, called *caityas*, were raised on the cemetery in memory of departed kings, nobles and great men. In accordance with this custom, it may be presumed that a *caitya* was built in memory of Buddha and that his disciples erected several other *caityas* by taking his remains to different parts of the country. This presumption, coupled with the fact that the sacrificial *caityas* of the Brāhmaṇas became scarce owing to the opposition of the Buddhists, accounts for the general identification of *caityas* with *bauddhāyatanas* by medieval commentators. The Rāmāyaṇa, however, refers beyond doubt to Brahmanical and not to Buddhist *caityas*.[1]

Images, as such, are mentioned only in the Uttarakāṇḍa. The mention of Śiva-*liṅga* (VII. 31. 42) and its worship by Rāvaṇa shows that the *liṅga*-symbol of Śiva had come into being in a later age—when Lakṣmī had come to be conceived as seated on a lotus (VII. 109. 6), and Viṣṇu had been visualized as lotus-eyed (VII. 37C. 12), bearer of a conch, a mace, a discus, a lotus and a Śārṅga (bow, VII. 37E. 44),... when Brahmā had come to be represented as possessing four faces (*caturmukha*, I. 2. 23). Thus, in the later portions of the Rāmāyaṇa, the various gods are visualized as having distinct, individual forms.

In the authentic portions of the Rāmāyaṇa, though images of the gods are not mentioned explicitly, references to the various articles of offering such as flowers, scents and sweets would be meaningless if there was no idol installed as the recipient. Description of the worship practised by Rāma and Kausalyā leaves a strong impression that they paid homage before an image of Viṣṇu and Janārdana. It had almost become a truism that "the deities of a person have the same food as he himself" (II. 103. 30). Sitting in the proper posture (*āsana*, II. 99. 15), and with absolute concentration of the mind (*yoga* and *samādhi*), and vows of all sorts—are frequently mentioned in this connection.

In the *āśrama* of Agastya's brother, the usual practice of sacrifices gave place to flower-offerings with which evidently the idols were worshipped (III. 11. 52). The *āśrama* of Agastya itself was an obviously idolatrous monastery (like the *maṭhas* of later times) with a developed iconographics (III. 12. 17-21).

The performance of *saṁskāras* or sacraments, as enjoined by the *Gṛhyasūtras*, seems to have been established, although they are curtly referred to. After the birth of Rāma and his three brothers, their *jātakarma-saṁskāra* was celebrated with eclat. Daśaratha gave in charity thousands of cows to Brāhmaṇas on the occasion. On the eleventh day, the name-giving ceremony was performed by the family priest, Vasiṣṭha, when Brāhmaṇas were given rich feast and presents. The other *saṁskāras* of the princes were performed in due course, but no details about them are given (I. 18. 16-24).

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[1] Narayana Aiyangar : *Caityas* (*Indian Antiquary*, Jan. 1882, pp. 20-2).

Going on pilgrimage must have been a vogue. When sage Viśvāmitra visited Daśaratha, the latter declared that by the sage's *darśana* he regarded himself as having been to all the holy places of worship (I. 18. 53). Sītā spoke of gods, temples, and *tīrthas* on the banks of the Gaṅgā and vowed to worship them after their safe return from the exile (II. 52. 90).

The cow continued to hold the same venerable position as it had since the Vedic times. Its killing was condemned as a heinous offence like the murder of a king or a Brāhmaṇa (IV. 17. 36). To touch a cow with one's foot or to milk it excessively, starving the calf consequently, was also regarded as sinful (II. 75. 22, 54). As a mark of auspiciousness, cows were placed in the forefront of the procession in which Rāma proceeded to Ayodhyā on his return from the forest exile (VI. 128. 38). Cows were included among the various items necessary at a royal coronation. Sanctity of the cow was on a par with that of the Brāhmaṇas and the virgins (VI. 128. 38; II. 14. 40-1). Viśvāmitra exhorted Rāma to slay Tāṭakā without qualm in the interest of cows and Brāhmaṇas (I. 25. 15).

The cow formed an indispensable item in the making of charitable gifts. Gift of cows to Brāhmaṇas was looked upon as an act of religious merit. At the birth of each of his four children, Daśaratha gave thousands of excellent cows by way of gift (I. 18. 20). Again, at Rāma's marriage ceremony, he performed *go-dāna* for the welfare of his sons (I. 72. 21-2). Particular merit was attached to the gift of milch cows—their horns plated with gold—accompanied by their calves and milking vessels (I. 72. 23). Vālmīki describes in a spirit of humour and admiration Rāma's gift of innumerable cows to the poor Brāhmaṇa Trijaṭa (II. 32. 36-40). Of all animals, cow formed the *sine qua non* of the religious life of hermits in the forest.

The Rāmāyaṇa age was marked by a plenitude of sacrifices. The highest position of celebrity a king could attain was through the performance of sacrifices. Lakṣmaṇa spoke of his father before Sugrīva as one who had performed several sacrifices like Agniṣṭoma and others, marked with liberal *dakṣiṇās* (IV. 4. 8). Kaikeyī referred to Daśaratha as a *yāyajūka* (II. 102. 5) or habitual performer of sacrifices. Ayodhyā boasted of sacrificial priests crowned with every virtue (II. 71. 20). Rāma at Citrakūṭa enquired of Bharata: "And do intelligent and sincere people, aware of the rules look after the sacrificial fire? And do they advise you regularly on the seasons for performing sacrifice?" (II. 100. 12).

How the ideas pertaining to sacrificial rituals had permeated the very thinking of the times is indicated by the innumerable sacerdotal similes interspersing the epic throughout (VI. 20. 41; I. 20. 28; VII. 19. 15). It is to be noted, however, that all this 'sacrificial' information is almost entirely available only in the first and last books of the Rāmāyaṇa.

There were four orders of priests (*ṛtviks*, I. 12. 5) officiating at a sacrifice: namely, *hota* or the caller whose business it was to recite Vedic *ṛks* or chants in praise of gods; *udgātā* or the singer who accompanied offerings into the sacrifice (especially Soma) with psalms; *adhvaryu* or the master of ceremonies whose business it was to mutter prayers and formulae at the proper moment; and *brahmā* or the supervisor of the entire ritual and kindler of the sacred fire. The sacrificial priests had to be well-versed in the Vedas (I. 14. 3).

Many injunctions were laid down to ensure well-disciplined conduct of the rites during the session. After getting himself formally initiated into the ceremony, the sacrificer had to observe all rules pertaining to it by keeping his mind stilled and senses subdued (I. 18. 2; 29. 30). An outburst of temper was considered unbecoming. While complaining to Daśaratha about the mischief wrought by the demons during his sacrifices, Viśvāmitra confessed: "I cannot bring myself to vent my wrath (on these fools), for such is the nature of that business (of sacrifice) that it is not proper for one engaged in it to pronounce a curse" (I. 19. 7-8).

Punctilious care was taken to see that the sacrifice was performed in strict conformity with the rules prescribed in scriptures. Terms like *yathāvidhi* (I. 14. 3), *yathāśāstram* (I. 13. 41), *yathānyāyam* (I. 14. 3), *śāstrataḥ* (I. 14. 4) and *vidhipūrvam* (I. 13. 19), denoting adherence to scriptural injunctions, occur time and again in the epic in connection with the performance of sacrifices. A defective sacrifice was bound to bring misfortune to all concerned (I. 39. 10). In giving out instructions to his assistants at his Aśvamedha, Daśaratha warned them all to see that "no default occurred in its performance, for flaws in this foremost of sacrifices are watched by Brahma-rākṣasas. Should it be celebrated in violation of the rules, the performer shall meet with instant destruction. And hence, so order that this sacrifice is performed according to the prescription of the ritual" (I. 12. 17-9). In order to secure it against disturbances, certain propitiatory rites (*śāntayaḥ*) were observed (I. 12. 16). Daśaratha took good care to come to the sacrificial grounds on a day presided over by an auspicious star (I. 13. 39).

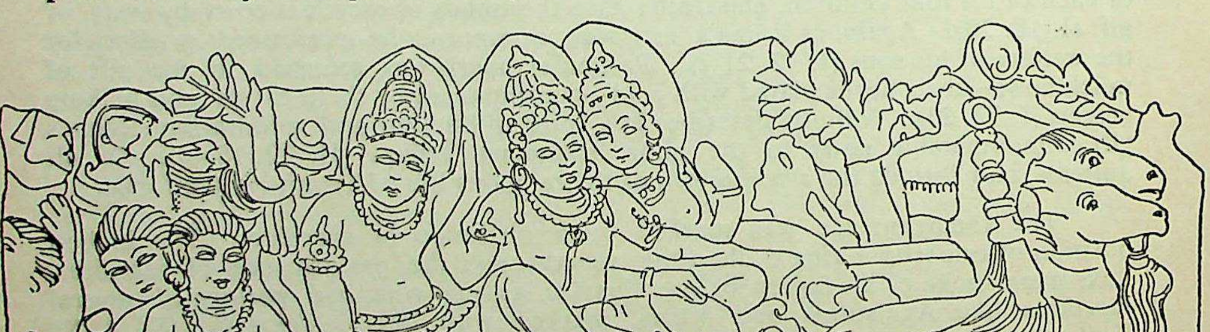

Fig. 104. Departure of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa from the capital; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Wife's company was invariably necessary at a sacrifice in the case of a householder. A river bank, a forest, an hermitage or vicinity of a sacred mountain—were usually the sites chosen for the sacrificial observances.

Sacrificial utensils, too, had come to be deified. Kausalyā invoked the holy fuel, the sacrificial grass, the sanctified altars and the sacrificial shed to look after Rāma in the forest (II. 25. 7). Rāma is said to have circumambulated the vessels that were to be employed in his coronation (II. 19. 31). Clarified butter, sacrificial cakes, *kuśa* and stakes of catechu, having been used in one sacrifice, could not be used in another (II. 61. 17). It was deemed a great demerit if the sacrificer refused to pay the promised fee (*dakṣiṇā*) to the officiating priests (II. 75. 26).

Performance of Aśvamedha, foremost amongst sacrifices, was a royal way of proclaiming and securing unchallenged supremacy over the land ; and all kings were eligible to perform it. A graphic idea of the Aśvamedha sacrifice performed in those days is given in the description of the one celebrated by Daśaratha (I. 13-4) and another by Rāma (VII. 91-3).

Animals were, no doubt, slaughtered during sacrifices. The Aśvamedha centred on the slaughter of the consecrated horse and offering of its members to the deities. There are frequent allusions to animals brought for slaughter to sacrifices (III. 56. 9 ; 70. 6). Beasts were slain at Rāvaṇa's funeral ceremony which was performed according to Vedic rites (VI. 111. 117). Lakṣmaṇa, however, disapproved of the practice of animal sacrifice and considered killing of the helpless things to be *kutsita* or reprehensible (III. 70. 6).

There are a few instances in the epic in which ascetics and holy men have consigned their own bodies to Fire by way of a sacrifice. Śabarī speaks of her pious preceptors, sages of the Mataṅgavana, who offered their persons, consecrated by *mantras* to the fire (III. 74. 22). With the permission of Rāma, now Śabarī herself follows the example of her mentors (III. 74. 32). This shows that such acts of self-sacrifice were approved by society. Again, *ṛṣi* Śarabhaṅga, soon after Rāma had visited him, offered oblations of butter into the sacrificial fire and gave up his body limb by limb and, "then, the soul of the sage passed to heaven" (III. 5. 38-9).

No explanatory comment is available for the kind of sacrifice Śarabhaṅga made. From the manner of description and the attendant circumstances, it would seem inappropriate to describe the above sacrifices as suicide. In later literature, Śūdraka's entering into fire voluntarily appears to be a parallel instance, and one commentator describes it by the term Sarvasvāra, which is explained by Kātyāyana (XVII. 184) as *maraṇa-kāmasya sarvasvāraḥ kṛtānna-dakṣiṇaḥ* (*i.e.*, Sarvasvāra is a sacrifice performed by one intent on dying, having dispensed with all food and gifts). Govindarāja is inclined to designate Śarabhaṅga's self-sacrifice by the term Brahmamedha. The *Śānti-parva* in the *Mahābhārata* reduces sacrifices to three principal ones : Rājasūya, Aśvamedha and Sarvamedha. Is this Sarvamedha the equivalent of Brahmamedha or Sarvasvāra which was the sacrifice made by Śūdraka and possibly by Śarabhaṅga ?[1]

Among the religious beliefs of the age, the doctrine of animism, or the attribution of a spirit or soul to an inanimate object, occupied an important place. Inanimate objects of nature like mountains, trees and lakes were invested with life, so too the seasons and other divisions of time, and heaven and earth, and sky and air. These were invoked by Kausalyā to grant protection to Rāma during the exile (II. 25). Forest areas were believed to be presided over by sylvan deities (*vana-devatā*, I. 31. 14).

The *saṅgama* (II. 54. 22) or confluence of rivers was held sacred. Viśvāmitra asked Rāma to offer his obeisance to the confluence of the Sarayū and the Gaṅgā

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[1] S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar : *Sarvasvāra* (B. C. Law Volume, ii, pp. 413f.).

(I. 24. 10-1). Gaṅgā in time came to be revered as the holiest of the rivers (I. 45. 6; 43. 39; II. 50. 20, 24). A bath in its waters, "flowing from the feet of Viṣṇu,"[1] was believed to purge one of all sins (II. 50. 24). Even people whose ashes were washed with Gaṅgā-*salila* (I. 43. 41) were supposed to be purified and led to salvation (I. 41. 20; 42. 19)—a belief which is held even today. Gaṅgā-water was used also at a coronation (II. 14. 34).

Rāma, on getting into the boat for crossing the Gaṅgā on his way to the forest, offered prayers to the holy river for securing its blessings. Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā bowed and sipped water on getting into the boat. When the boat reached midstream, Vaidehī folded her hands, reverently prayed to the river goddess for favours, and promised to worship her regularly with food and drink (II. 52. 78-89).

It is not Gaṅgā alone which has a sanctifying and superhuman character; the Yamunā (II. 55. 8), the Tamasā (I. 2. 6), the Godāvarī (III. 49. 31), the Sarayū (I. 24. 10)—all share this attribute of divinity. "And this deification of rivers is presumably a testimony, if any were needed, to the sanctifying value of water as personified by the rivers. In other words, the rivers embody the Water Spirit, and to do reverence to them is to propitiate the Spirit by which alone the fields can yield their produce."[2]

The company of river consorts enjoyed by Samudrarāja (the lord of the ocean), described in the Rāmāyaṇa (V. 21. 23-4), is a development of the Vedic idea of Varuṇa (the lord of waters) as a controller over the rivers.[3]

The prevalence of tree worship, as in ancient Gaul and Britain later, may also be postulated. *Nyagrodha* or banyan was held sacred and reverently referred to as *mahāvṛkṣa*, the Great Tree. Sītā on her way to the forest bowed to and circumambulated the large banyan tree on the banks of the Kālindī, entreated it to enable her husband to fulfil his vow (II. 55. 25-6).

Some places were considered particularly holy. Gayā was, and continues to be, the sacred place for offering *śrāddha* to the departed (II. 107. 11, 13). Siddhāśrama was a spot of hallowed sanctity by reason of its association with Viṣṇu's austerities (I. 29). In the age of the Uttarakāṇḍa, Naimiṣa forest became an ideal place for holding sacrificial sessions (VII. 91. 15). Himālayas were the reputed abode of seekers after religious merit (I. 48. 33). Mere sight of Mt. Citrakūṭa, which was resorted to by great sages, was believed to purge a man of his sins (II. 54. 30).

The existence of numerous gods in the theology of the day points to polytheism. The old Vedic deities were still being worshipped, though they had become completely anthropomorphized, and a host of new deities had come into being. Their immortality was not absolute, since their life-span was only an exaggeration of the ordinary mortal's, and their positions were regarded as attainable by human beings through virtuous acts. But three super-deities—Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva—credited respectively with the cyclic evolution, maintenance and merger of the universe (and known as the Trinity) were looked upon as the three functional aspects of the Absolute (*Brahman*). They were given, jointly as well as individually,

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1. The feet (*pāda*) of Trivikrama (or Vāmana, an incarnation of Viṣṇu) that measured the universe in three strides—an allusion repeatedly made in the epic—invested the feet of Viṣṇu (*Viṣṇu-pada*) with special sanctity. From this was derived the concept of *pada*-worship or worship of the feet of revered elders. This concept is brought out by the story of the *pādukās* of Rāma installed by Bharata on the throne of Ayodhyā (C. Sivaramamurti : *Amarāvatī Sculptures*, p. 61).
2. Stanley Rice : *Hindu Customs and Their Origin*, pp. 151f.
3. *Amarāvatī Sculptures*, p. 70.

all the epithets of the Absolute such as unborn, eternal, all-pervasive, the source and container of all, etc.[1] However, these qualities of the Godhead are found mostly in the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa only.

As regards the comparative greatness of Viṣṇu and Śiva, the Bālakāṇḍa relates an interesting story (I. 75): It is said that Brahmā, in order to satisfy the curiosity of the gods who were desirous of witnessing the comparative might of Viṣṇu and Śiva, sowed seeds of dissension between them. There ensued a terrible fight between them, and both Śiva and Viṣṇu fought each other out with a burning desire for victory over the other. Śiva's bow of terrible prowess flew back at the menacing sound (of Viṣṇu) and the Three-Eyed Śiva stood there nonplussed. Then all the gods along with the sages and the Cāraṇas hurried to the spot and entreated the two to calm themselves. Beholding Śiva's bow silenced by the prowess of Viṣṇu, the saintly company considered Viṣṇu to be more powerful, and Rudra had to lose his authority over the Bow.

Although the above story alludes to the temporary superiority of Viṣṇu over Śiva, genuine portions of the epic do not sound any note of discord between the votaries of the two gods. There is no evidence to show that the doctrines of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism were in conflict with each other, and many instances can be cited to prove that the worship of both was prevalent in the same household. Rāma, who performed worship of Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu at Ayodhyā (II. 6. 1-4), is said to have offered an oblation in Śiva's honour (no less than in Viṣṇu's) at Citrakūṭa (II. 56. 31). Bharata at Citrakūṭa implored Rāma to return to Ayodhyā, saying: "Head bowed, I beg of you to show mercy to us, your kinsmen, even as Maheśvara shows compassion to all creatures (II. 106. 31). While returning from Laṅkā by air in the Puṣpaka, Rāma, on the way showed Sītā the Setubandha, "where the great god Mahādeva had conferred a favour on me" (VI. 123. 20). Here, according to the commentator, Rāma acknowledges the blessings and grace of Śiva in the construction of the mighty bridge across the Deep; and it is very likely that after the bridging of the sea, he established a Śiva-*liṅga* on the sea-shore to commemorate the event. Even in the age of the Uttarakāṇḍa, no discord is traceable between votaries of the cults of Śiva and Viṣṇu. At his Aśvamedha sacrifice, Rāma quoted with approval the opinion of sage Kardama that there was no higher refuge than the Bull-bannered God, just as there was no higher sacrifice than the Aśvamedha (VII. 90. 12).

Although the existence of a plurality of gods points to polytheism, there is an essential unity running through the endless multiplicity of divinities. Thus, Sūrya, who is said to combine the functions of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Skanda, is called the soul and essence of all gods (VI. 105. 7f.). This belief in the omnipotence of one God and the conception of a fundamental unity in all the gods makes for what in philosophy is called monotheism.

The doctrine of pantheism, which declares that the universe as a whole is God or that all things are simply modes or manifestations of God, is clearly suggested where Kausalyā invokes all conceivable objects from gods to demons, from mountains to rivers, from stars to flies, gnats and worms. and from seasons to hours in the day—and implores them all as manifestations of divinity to protect her son in the forest (II. 25).

The world of the Rāmāyaṇa depicts gods and men as intimately associated with one another both in religious and secular spheres. The epic is replete with instances where gods are regarded as saviours of mankind. The invocation by Kaikeyī of the various gods to witness the oaths uttered by Daśaratha (II. 11. 13-6), Kausalyā's prayer to gods to protect her darling son in the forest (II. 25), Indra's coming to Rāma's help in the battle of Laṅka with his own chariot and charioteer (VI. 102), the intervention of Agni and Indra in the matter of Sītā's repudiation by Rāma (VI. 117-8)—are instances showing that the celestial gods were not indifferent to but rather took sympathetic interest in the affairs of the earthly and the mortals. Gods, in their turn, were at times helped by men. Indra, for instance, was helped by Daśaratha in his war against Śambara, the Asura chief (II. 9. 11). The Vāyu story (I. 32) shows gods desirous of winning an earthly maiden for spouse. In fact, in ancient India, as in ancient Greece still later, there was rapport between gods and men ; and the former, although immortal, were suppossd to have the vices and virtues of men.

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[1] S. Radhakrishnan (Ed.) : *History of Philosophy Eastern and Western*, pp. 78-9 (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London).

Worship of demi-gods and malignant beings (*bhūtas*, III. 25. 43) had also prevailed. Kausalyā, on the eve of Rāma's departure, is said to have worshipped the *bhūtas* to ensure his safety in the jungle (II. 25. 43). She also worshipped the savage cannibals so that they do no harm to her beloved son (II. 25. 20). In the Uttarakāṇḍa, Śiva is called *bhūtapati* or lord of the *bhūtas* (VII. 16. 43). Hanumān, before taking his leap across the ocean, is said to have paid respects to the *bhūtas* (V. 1. 8).

The standard of morality was of a high order. Of the citizens of Ayodhyā, Vālmīki says : "They were happy and righteous, and each was content with his possessions without covetously seeking for more, and everyone spoke the truth. It was impossible to find in Ayodhyā any person greedy or lewd, cruel, illiterate, or atheistic. All men and women were of excellent character, well-restrained, happy and spotless like the *maharṣis*. There was none but was not self-possessed or was mean, or ignored *agnihotra* or other sacrifices. There was no theft in Ayodhyā nor was there any admixture of castes. All Brāhmaṇas were pure and were engaged in the discharge of their own duties, with senses subdued, making gifts and studying, and receiving with discrimination. There was no atheist, none untruthful, and none envious. There was none who did not learn Vedangas, no one was stingy. Nor was there any one weak, insane or demented. The *varṇas*, with Brāhmaṇas at the head, always worshipped gods and guests, and were grateful, generous, heroic and dignified. People were long-lived, abiding by duty and truth" (I. 6).

Ethical virtues, as an integral part of *dharma*, have found so much emphasis in the Rāmāyaṇa that it is virtually "ethics turned poetry."[1] Fulfilment of one's promise was one of the corner-stones on which the structure of the Rāmāyaṇa morality was based. Daśaratha courted the exile of Rāma and his own consequent death in preference to the infamy of being false to a promise given years ago. Rāma has ever stood as the symbol of steadfast adherence to a pledge. "Rāma does not contradict himself" (II. 18. 30) is an adage current to this day.

Truthfulness is repeatedly stressed as the highest virtue. Various degrees of sin accrue from varying acts of falsehood. "He that speaks falsehood with reference to a horse becomes guilty of the death of 100 horses ; he committing himself to falsehood relative to a cow courts the sin of slaying a hundred cows ; he that utters an untruth, touching a human being destroys himself as well as all his kin" (IV. 34. 9).

Ungratefulness was considered heinous. To Sugrīva, unmindful of his promise to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa said : "That ungrateful person who, having at first attained benefit at the hands of his friend, does not requite it, deserves to be slain... Atonement has been prescribed by the good for the slayer of a cow, for a drunkard, for a thief and for a violater of a vow, but there is no expiation available to the ungrateful" (IV. 34. 10-2).

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[1] S. Radhakrishnan : *op. cit.*, p. 79.

Exercise of proper control over one's evil propensities was an integral part of morality. A self-controlled mind was a condition precedent to spiritual salvation. Terms like *ātmavān* (I. 1. 4), *niyatātmā* (I. 1. 8), *vaśī* (I. 1. 8) and *jitendriya* (I. 6 13), denoting a man of self-control, are frequently used in connection with a man of character. Higher (spiritual) regions are incapable of being attained by persons who have not schooled themselves by restraint (III. 5. 8).

Charity was another hall-mark of piety and righteousness. It was deemed conducive to one's welfare here and hereafter. The ideal of charity was the capacity to part gladly with whatever was begged for by a suppliant. *Bhūdāna* was highly esteemed and one who made grants of land was believed to attain to an excellent state of existence after death (III. 68. 29). Andhamuni blessed his dead son to attain to the same felicity as bestowers of land and donors of a thousand cows attained (II. 64 43-4). Charitable acts were known as *pūrta* (I. 28. 8).

Cremation was the usual method for disposal of the dead among Aryans. Daśaratha (II. 76. 17-8) and the family of Andhamuni (II. 64. 57) were cremated. So too was Rāvaṇa (VI. 111) among the Rākṣasas, and Vālī (IV. 25. 49-50) among the Vānaras. It was the heart-felt craving of every father that his funeral rites be performed by the eldest of his sons. Wheu Indrajit fell in battle, Rāvaṇa bewailed the perversity of fate that had left him to perform the obsequies of one who by right should have performed his last rites (VI. 92. 14). The sons, who performed the funerary rites of their father, were supposed to be fortunate (II. 86 18; 51. 20). Rāma at Citrakūṭa bemoaned his double fault in having been the cause of his father's death and in having failed in the duties he owed to his remains. He applauded Bharata and Śatrughna who had been fortunate enough to perform father's obsequies (II. 103. 9-10). Cremation and funeral were postponed till the son's arrival. Daśaratha's body was preserved in oil till Bharata was back from Kekaya, as the idea of consigning it to the flames in the absence of a son did not commend itself to them (II. 66. 27). It is noteworthy that of the three renowned kings, the pomp and splendour of whose funerals is detailed in the Rāmāyaṇa, the only one lucky to have a son in attendance "to close his eyes at death" had been Vālī.

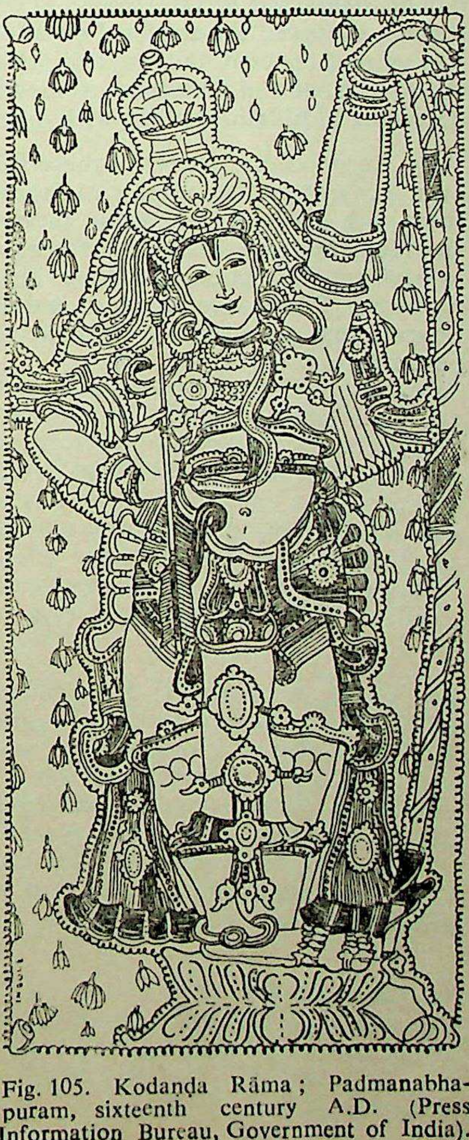

Fig. 105. Kodaṇḍa Rāma; Padmanabhapuram, sixteenth century A.D. (Press Information Bureau, Government of India).

Funeral rites were generally performed much the same way as they are today except that the collecting of ashes was done on the thirteenth day and not on the second as now (II. 77. 4-5). Among the post-funeral rites, the *udaka* (II. 102. 7) or water ceremony involved the presentation of sacred waters specially to the manes soon after cremation (III. 68. 35-6). The waters rite was followed by the *nirvāpa* (II. 103. 28) or *piṇḍadāna*, out of the river, which consisted in offering *piṇḍa* or bolus to the manes.

The manes of an individual may be regarded as two classes : one (the *pretas*)—comprising parents lately departed and were very much remembered and revered as if alive (II. 76. 3); and two (the *pitṛs*)—comprising the distant near-forgotten, mythical ancestors (II. 102. 8). The first concept is embodied in the obsequial ritual following immediately after death in the form of *preta-kārya* (II. 76. 11) and *nirvāpa* (II. 103. 28) rites, as performed by Bharata on the twelfth day of the demise of Daśaratha. These rites have an occasional character and, as it were, prepared the departed ones for their status next year as *pitṛs* or ancestors. The second concept finds expression in the daily *pitṛ-yajña* and the annual *śrāddhas* (II. 61. 12), and in the constant mention of *pitṛs* as gods (*pitṛ-devatā*, I. 49. 5), deserving of oblations along with other deities.

An important aspect of these *śrāddhas* was the feeding of the Brāhmaṇas (as even now) who were supposed to represent the spirits of the dead, and presenting them with *dakṣiṇā. Śrāddhas* in honour of ancestral manes were performed at specific periods—at least once a year, on the anniversary day. Every son was expected to perform *śrāddha* once at least at Gayā, regarded as the holiest place for the purpose. Rāma gave vent to this desire of every father of that age when he told Bharata that people crave for many sons so that one at least might go to Gayā and perform *śrāddha* (II. 107. 13).

CHAPTER XXIII

PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

The doctrine of *karma* and transmigration, which is one of the corner-stones of Indian philosophy, is recognized and stressed everywhere in the Rāmāyaṇa. *Karma* was regarded as the *prayojana* or motive force of all causations—the well-spring of all happiness or misery (VI. 64. 7). Rāma was of the opinion that this world is a place of action (*karma-bhūmi*) for performing good and bad deeds, the fruits of which we must reap sooner or later; even the gods have to bear the consequences of their actions (II. 109. 28). The law of *karma* is but an extension of the inevitable law of causation in the field of morality: whatever a man sows that shall he reap. "The fruit of *dharma* alone does not accrue to one who has earned it, but is bound up also with the fruit of *a-dharma*, its opposite; nor does *dharma* cancel *adharma*: one gets the fruit of the one as surely as that of the other" (V. 51. 28-9).

The theory of *karma* is a logical explanation of Evil, and of the varying fortunes of individual lives. Thus, Rāma attributes all his misfortunes including the loss of Sītā to his past sins (III. 63. 4-6). Captive Sītā wondered what big iniquity or evil deeds she had committed in her previous birth that made her suffer so (V. 25. 18). Daśaratha attributed his misfortune, consequent upon the unreasonable demands of Kaikeyī, to his misdeeds in some previous existence (II. 12. 79).

That there is a logical correspondence between the nature of the sin committed and that of the fruit resulting therefrom is illustrated by Rāma's belief that his mother in some former birth must have brought about the separation of a mother from her children in consequence of which a similar bereavement had befallen her (II. 53. 19). Kausalyā herself lamented that she must have cut off in some former life the paps of cows when the calves were thirsting for their mother's milk and that, therefore, she was paying for her past sins by suffering the separation from her son (II. 43. 17). Sītā, lamenting over the (supposed) death of Rāma, bewailed that in some other life she must have failed to give away choice gifts and had, therefore, to suffer sorrow now (VI. 32. 30).

If, on the one hand, the perpetrator of iniquitous acts is bound to go to hell inasmuch as the wages of sin is misery, meritorious acts, on the other, result in bliss and prosperity for the performer. The ladies of Ayodhyā thought that Sītā, who had captivated Rāma's heart, must certainly have performed some great austerities in her past life or else she could not have become *the* beloved companion of Rāma (II. 16. 41-2). When Sampāti saw the Vānaras verily as god-sent for himself, he averred that a man reaps the fruit of his former acts; and, therefore, it was that this food ordained to that end had come to him after a long time (IV. 56. 4). *Maharṣis* were believed to attain heaven as a result of their hard austerities (II. 109. 29).

No man is, however, to reap what he did not sow nor is any deed lost or credited to another. In the Uttarakāṇḍa, the Brāhmaṇa with his dead child wonders what sinful action of his should have caused his son's untimely death when he remembers not to have committed anything iniquitous (VII. 73. 7-8). Nor is one answerable for the iniquities committed by another. A servant is not to blame if he carries out the unrighteous behests of his master (VI. 113. 42). When Hanumān seeks Sītā's permission to slay the Rākṣasī guards who used to torment her in Laṅkā, she restrains him by saying that her sufferings *are* due to *her* past *karma* and that her guards are just carrying out the commands of their superior (VI. 113. 36-8).

The epic holds that a man's deeds, even if performed in ignorance, shall not go unrewarded. He who, on the eve of commencing any undertaking, fails to think of the consequences to follow, light or grave, agreeable or otherwise, is styled a child (II. 63. 7). When the destruction of creatures as ordained by the Destroyer is at hand, men become careless in their action (III. 56. 16). Jaṭāyu frankly tells Rāvaṇa that he for his own destruction has engaged in such impious acts (like the kidnapping of others' wives) as are perpetrated by men whose end is imminent. What creature, not barring even the Omnipotent One, will dare to perform a deed manifestly connected with evil (and yet hope to remain absolved from the fruit thereof) (III. 51. 31-2)? The person who, without apprehending the principle of causation, mad rushes into an action must grieve when the harvest comes even as he who waters *kiṁśuka* trees after hewing down his mango grove (II. 63. 9).

A pertinent question arises : When do the deeds of a man fructify? The Rāmāyaṇa answers that just as corn requires the assistance of time to ripen, so do actions blossom into results in due course (III. 49. 27). One undergoes pleasant or bitter experiences by the ripening of one's past actions (*daśāyoga*, VI. 113. 39). But without unstinted application, no actions of unknown quality and uncertain fruit attain maturity : *i.e.*, courageous action is necessary to force issues to their ultimate result, whatever that be. Lakṣmaṇa employs this very plea to exhort Rāma to resort to action for the recovery of Sītā (III. 66. 16).

However, the fruit of awfully heinous crimes, or extraordinarily meritorious acts, is believed to materialize far sooner. When Rāvaṇa narrates to Kumbhakarṇa his plight in the battle with Rāma, the latter remarks that even as a sinner reaps perdition, verily the fruit of his (Rāvaṇa's) unrighteous act, that of Sītā's abduction, has befallen him sooner (during his present life-time) (VI. 62. 3).

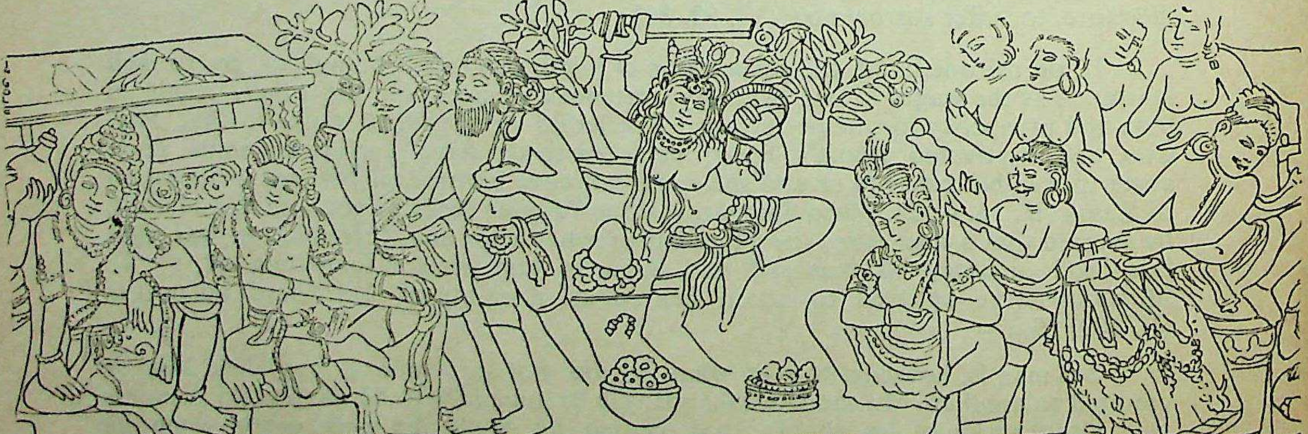

Fig. 106. Vasiṣṭha installing Rāma and Sītā on the throne of Ayodhyā ; Prambanan, Java, ninth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

The various curses pronounced by sages on offenders further illustrate the force, albeit through human agency, of the law of *karma, viz.*, making the sinful suffer the consequences of their acts. The maturing of the curse pronounced by the parents of the ascetic youth unwittingly killed by Daśaratha is an outspoken instance of misfortune reaped in consequence of the misery inflicted. At one place, however, the poet deprecates cruel retaliation even towards those who commit sinful deeds in so far as that reduces all—the enlightened as well as the ignorant without discrimination—to the same level. He lays down that it behoves the pious, crowned with excellent character, to observe the rules of piety and to show compassion even to those who perpetrate crimes and deserve to be slain (VI. 113. 42-4). One does not reap righteousness by slaying a former sinner, nor does one wrong cancel out another (II. 96. 24).

The best course, therefore, is to leave everything to God, the primal source of everything, Who makes everyone reap the fruit of his acts (VI. 32. 13). The Self in our hearts is the witness of all our good and bad thoughts and words (IV. 28. 15). The whole world is guided by God's dispensations and He administers happiness or misery to human beings according to their deserts. Nothing in the three worlds can escape His dispensation and is completely subject to His Laws (IV. 24. 42-3).

This Rule, laid down by *karma*, is not without some safety valves, however. Listening to holy episodes, visiting holy places, meeting holy people and bathing in holy waters can destroy sin. All sin, it is believed, is removed by listening to the sacred stories of Gaṅgāvataraṇa (I. 44. 22-3) and Rāmacarita (I. 1. 98). Likewise, a bath in a holy river washes off one's sins (I. 43. 30). Offering sacrifices and doing penance also can yield the same result, as many legends in the Uttarakāṇḍa illustrate (VII. 59B. 31).

As against the general rule that no man reaps what he has not sown, there are instances when an individual does benefit by the merits of others or suffer from the defaults of others. In the legend of Triśaṅku, sage Viśvāmitra directs the king to proceed to heaven on the strength of *his* penance (I. 60. 14-5). Rāma sends Jaṭāyu to the heavenly abode by the power of his grace (III. 68. 30). The dreadful drought which occurred in the kingdom of Romapāda is said to have been due to some default on the king's part which resulted in the misery of all his subjects (I. 9. 8-9). This belief, concerning the king, may be used to explain away what is really a default on the part of the subjects themselves, for, ultimately, *yathā rājā tathā prajāḥ*. To the same category belongs the view that the wife shares the fate of her husband for no special merit or otherwise of hers (II. 27. 5).

In order to accomplish the working out of *karma*, or the inescapable consequence of deeds, the philosophy of the age subscribed to belief in successive births and deaths, making it possible for man to receive the due wages of his sins or merits as the case may be.

A belief in the continued existence of the soul, *i.e.*, life not ending with the death of the body, was strongly embedded in the people's mind. Rāma felt himself quite equal to the task of forcibly occupying all Ayodhyā and the whole world (in defiance of Kaikeyī's desires), but, said he, being afraid of unrighteousness and of "life unknown," he abstained from doing so (II. 53. 25-6). This certitude of another world (*paraloka*), and of its being won over by a moral life, runs throughout the poem (II. 60. 6; 105. 40). Kaikeyī held truthfulness to be of supreme importance to man vis-a-vis the next world (II. 11. 29). Rāma believed that *dharma* and the soul were eternal; and that Daśaratha, who was a virtuous man, had gone to heaven (II. 105. 32-3).

But, again, life in heaven too is short-lived ; and, after the merit was exhausted (V. 54. 24), the individual descended from that exalted position. There are frequent references to the dropping down of planets—supposed to be heavenly beings—when their merit had waned (VII. 14. 22). Several legends are related of saints being reborn on earth after the exhaustion of their merits.

The widespread belief in *karma* and the general leaning towards fatalism tended to foster in man a pessimistic outlook on life. In spite of the frequent descriptions of miraculous happenings, we encounter in the epic, an overhanging sense of death and decay. "No creature," says Rāma, "is endowed with the power of exercising control over the course of events—man has no independent status in nature ; Death has power over him both here and hereafter. Those who increase are destined to deteriorate, those who go upward ultimately fall, those who come together separate in the end ; and life ends in death. As a ripe fruit must needs fall to the earth, so is man doomed to die. Even as a stout-pillared edifice, getting decayed, moulders : so man, coming under the sway of decrepitude and death, gets enfeebled. A night that has gone by is like the full Yamunā which, having entered the sea, does not return" (II. 105. 15-9).

The seers of the age, therefore, built their ideal of life on a deep sense of the evanescence of earthly life: "People rejoice at the rising of the sun, they are delighted at the approach of the night, but they do not realize that their lives have meanwhile shortened. People are exhilarated at the commencement of a new season in a novel fashion, though in reality creatures get their lives shortened at the change of seasons...As logs of wood come together on the surface of the wide ocean and, having drifted together for a time, they part : so do wives, sons, kindred and wealth, having been in association for a time, go away—their separation is certain" (II. 105. 25-7).

To this cloud of pessimism the epic, however, gives a silver lining. It says that though life is full of misery, yet it is incapable of being renounced (II. 57. 22). The couples (of hunger and thirst, ignorance and grief, sickness and death) are common to all creatures, and, being inevitable, one ought not to be overwhelmed by them (II. 77. 23). If this body is like a bubble, why should one lament for another (IV. 21. 3) ? Perceiving life to be a current that never turns back, one ought to strive for happiness through righteousness, for all men are said to be born to that end. As a man, falling in with a journeying caravan, says : "I too will accompany you," so does the journey of life, already performed by a long line of those gone before, rope us in. When one joins the changeless journey, deliberately or otherwise, how can one complain (II. 105. 29-31) ?

In contrast to the impression created by the later literature and the teachings of the Upaniṣads, life is nowhere looked upon as a bondage, and emancipation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of birth and death does not appear to be openly preached as an aim worth the pursuit.[1] "No living being," says Vālmīki, "is immune from calamities...and uninterrupted happiness is not easy to secure ;...but joy comes to a person if he continues to live even after an hundred years."[2]

Pessimism is the note often struck by those in epic to whom destiny has been unkind. During her captivity in Laṅkā, Sītā says: "O cursed be this 'subject' life which men immersed in pleasure are unable to renounce" (V. 25. 20). Even Rāma (especially when he is in the throes of grief caused by Sītā's abduction and the seeming impossibility of her recovery) is no more superhuman. Instead of showing undaunted courage and defiance of even the gods, he utters helpless lamentations and resorts to pious moralizing. Faced with disaster, he does not betray a burning passion for vengeance and discourses on religious ideas. In this predicament, the heartening words of Lakṣmaṇa come to him as a welcome relief. "Be calm," says the younger Rāghava. "Don't be dejected. The object of one's desire can hardly be obtained if one forsakes endeavour...Nothing is beyond the reach of one endowed with the capacity for spirited action. Such men never lag behind in enterprise. Men of your calibre, gifted with a high intellect and purpose, do not waver when faced with adversities, even as mountains hit by violent winds budge not. Even if Vaidehī is dead or lost, it does not behove you to lament for her like a commoner. If stalwarts like you cannot face a mishap with calm, how much less the rest of us, weak-kneed mortals ? Take courage, for adversity is the common lot of humanity" (IV. 1. 120-2; III. 67. 7-8; 66. 5-6, 13).

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[1] The final goal of man is indicated by the ambiguous term *brahmaloka*.

[2] See III. 66. 6 ; II. 18. 13 ; V. 34. 6 ; VI. 126. 2.

Sometimes it is Sugrīva who instills into Rāma a new hope by asking him to abandon his attitude of sorrow even as a self-controlled ascetic casts away any course of thought which interferes with the attainment of his purpose ; for, he who lacks courage and enthusiasm is cowed down and allows sorrow to overwhelm him, thus losing all his aspirations and eventually all hope of advancement (VI. 2. 4, 6). Another heartening utterance comes from Aṅgada who raises the morale of his fellow-Vānaras, dejected because of their failure to find Sītā : "Do not give your mind over to the evil of despondency which kills a man as does an angry serpent a child. Allowing oneself to fall in despondency at a time, when bravery and action are called for, leaves one a worthless, helpless creature—his objective foredoomed to failure" (IV. 64. 9-10)

Foiled in his attempts to locate Sītā in Laṅkā, Hanumān thinks of ending his life out of sheer despair, but, on cool reflection, realizes that "many are the evils born of suicide, whereas a man *may* attain one's object by continuing to live ; hence I will live and surely one day *must* meet Sītā" (V. 13. 45). When Bharata, pining for Rāma's return from exile, sees Hanumān bringing news of his brother's homecoming, and again when Sītā, bemoaning her fate in the Aśoka grove in Laṅkā, sees Hanumān as a god-sent messenger of her lord—the two are convinced that there is always wisdom in continuing to live in the hope of good news around the corner (VI. 126. 2 ; V. 34. 6).

On occasions, doubts are entertained as to the steadiness of the human mind. Daśaratha tries to hasten preparations for the Coronation, because in his opinion the hearts of men are inconstant and the hearts even of the virtuous may change under the force of natural impulses (II. 2. 27).

Though the absoluteness of moral conduct is emphasized more than once in the Rāmāyaṇa, morality is often disparaged by those who are roused to an occasional disregard of values in this shifting world. Thus Indrajit, bent upon killing the *māyā*-Sītā, gives a retort to Hanumān's protest: "You say, O monkey, that a woman should not be killed, but anything causing discomfiture to enemy is in order" (VI. 81. 28). Rāma, offended by the behaviour of the ocean, declares : "The world honours a boastful, evil-hearted, shameless fellow who casting consideration of piety to the wind defies and dares everybody ;...I should think chastisement is the supreme expedient for a man in this world ; fie on tolerance and forgiveness, sweet words and gifts to the ungrateful !" (VI. 21. 15-6 ; 22. 45).[1]

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[1] See S. Radhakrishnan (Ed.) : *op. cit.*, p. 80.

A vigorous distrust of pursuing righteousness in all events comes from Lakṣmaṇa who, seeing the plight of the righteous (Rāma) and the prosperity of the reprobate (Rāvaṇa), bursts into an outright denunciation of *dharma* itself in verses throbbing with poignancy, and sounding strangely modern.[1] "That *dharma*," says he to Rāma, "which is incapable of delivering the god-fearing from calamities, is profitless, especially those who have like you subdued their senses and abide constantly in good faith. If *dharma* dispenses unhappiness to the sinner, Rāvaṇa should go to hell and you possessed of virtue, should not come by misfortune. But when he is free from trouble and you are immersed in it, *dharma* and *adharma* must have tendencies contrary to those assigned to them by the scripture. If by dint of virtue one attains rewards as inevitably following it, and by unrighteousness harvests bitterness, then, let those that are unrighteous reap the fruit of their impiety, and those setting their face against sin and steeped in virtue, be not deprived of their composure at least if denied the fruits of their piety. But since the unrighteous are prosperous and the righteous unhappy—in the world as it is—both, *dharma* and *adharma*, to me, look ineffective, 'a lie direct' (VI. 83. 14-21).

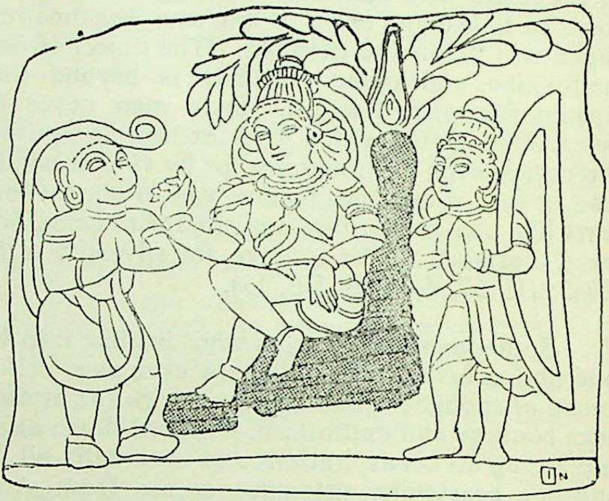
Fig. 107. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān ; Hazara Rāma Temple, *c*, sixteenth century A.D. (Department of Archaeology, Government of India).

Even to this line of reasoning, the epic has this to offer : that though the vicious as a rule are not seen meeting disaster as wages of their diabolic designs, there is no room for doubt as to the result of their deeds when the time comes—and come it must. In Vālī and Rāvaṇa are represented two types who seem to prosper in the midst of their very excesses but meet with retribution in due course nevertheless (VI. 111. 25).

An optimistic outlook on life is naturally born of a life of plenty and luxury. Barring a few cases of personal unhappiness, individual grievances or local misfortunes and disorders, the people as a whole lived a rich material life. Considering their high standard of living, artistic attainments and education, it was natural for them to take a bright and inspiring view of things. From the description of the city of Ayodhyā, "beautified by well-kept broad roads with avenues of flowering trees, rich and tastefully laid-out market-places, gilt sculptures and paintings by numerous artists and craftsmen, parks, groves and pleasure-villas for mixed companies of men and women; a city bristling with awe-inspiring decor and defence, and alive with the activities of heroic warriors and royal officials who knew and were known in foreign countries ; a city where the standard of living and outlook was very high, and whither merchants with their goods flocked from many lands; where music was a common pursuit with citizens, dramatic societies and ladies' clubs flourished in every neighbourhood, and carnivals, social gatherings and dinners were frequent; where companies of actors and dancers displayed their art; to whose suburban parks in the afternoon lovers drove on swift conveyances for rambles, bedecked virgins gathered for sports, and men of learning repaired to engage in edifying debates; where the teachers and priests were all steeped in the Vedas and *upa*-Vedas, and the Brāhmaṇas were neither illiterate nor with half-digested knowledge, nor atheistic"[1]— we can imagine that its inhabitants could not be prone to dejection and melancholy (I. 6. 6, 15).

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[1] *Op. cit.*

Such a state of affairs should not, however, be taken as conducive to a hedonistic view of life—a view often propounded by a profligate like Rāvaṇa (on one occasion, of all, to Sītā): "The youthfulness of women is transient, and so long as the flower thy youth doth not fade, do thou pass thy days happily" (V. 20. 12). The Cārvāka view of life, too, as propounded by Jābāli (II. 108), discounts moral values of life and advocates unabashed enjoyment of life and its pleasures. Such an attitude to life, however, was strongly discountenanced by the cultured people of the age, as Rāma's reply clearly shows (II. 109).

The Rāmāyaṇa conception of an ideal life envisages an all-round existence that embraces in due measure all the varied colours of its spectrum—material as well as spiritual. King Daśaratha, before abdicating in favour of his eldest son, thus speaks of his own well-lived life, evidently to serve as an example to the Crown Prince: "Rāma, I am old and long-lived. All the coveted pleasures of life have been thoroughly enjoyed by me. I have performed hundreds of sacrifices, and offered plenty of food and *dakṣiṇās*. I am blessed with a son in you after my own heart who is incomparable in the world. I have freely given, sacrificed and studied. I am free from the debts due to the gods, the sages, the elders and the Brāhmaṇas. Nothing more remains to be done by me except your installation" (II. 4. 12-5). A judicious enjoyment of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* thus was the ideal of a full, rich and successful life (II. 100. 62-3).

On the whole, the attitude towards life in the Rāmāyaṇa age appears to have been, like many things else in life, a compromise between optimism and pessimism. In fact, the organization of ancient Indian society was based on a synthetic and well-balanced arrangement of situations and values, and naturally, therefore, all phases of "outlook" are easily discernible in it. The scheme of the four *āśramas* in itself was intended to spur the holders of the respective stages resolutely to make progressive efforts. This fact, as well as the happy, merry, contented life led by the common people, tended to make their attitude to life optimistic. But the fact that sojourn here was regarded as in a vale suffering, with a belief in the predestination of events and happenings, points to a built-in helplessness; and in this way the people's outlook may be considered pessimistic. It must, however, be borne in mind that although asceticism and renunciation might be the outcome of such an attitude towards life, exertion and constant striving for a better condition of life was an essential feature of the hermit life nonetheless. The *vānaprastha* and *saṁnyāsa* stages of life, though inspired by a spirituality, were not a result of disgust and sorrow but the proper conclusion of a well thought-out project which took into account life in all its details and as a whole.[2]

Coming to the ideal of *dharma* held in the age, we find that the word *dharma* is ubiquitous in the Rāmāyaṇa and comprises the whole gamut of Godward thought, speech and action. It includes all that is conducive to virtuous life and excludes all that is at variance with it. "It is the source of wealth and happiness, the conferrer of all good, the crux of this mundane existence" (III. 9. 30). "As the artistic sense colours the entire outlook of the artist and gives a touch of individuality and beauty not merely to his painting and music, but also to his writings and discourses, nay, even to his walking, eating and sitting, so also *dharma* was meant to give a holy, blissful, loving and heroic turn to the outlook of its votary and introduce its distinctive fragrance and sweetness into all the activities of his daily life."[1]

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[1] S. C. Sarkar: *Educational Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p. 109; also see the Rāmāyaṇa I. 5-7; II. 67.

[2] See B. S. Upadhyaya: *India in Kālidāsa*, p. 80.

There is nothing so hard as *dharma* to acquire in this world. An important requisite in its acquirement is a resoluteness in doing one's duty in life however unpleasant and whatever the difficulties on the way, the natural and seductive love of ease and luxury notwithstanding (III. 9. 31).

At some places, the epic limits the scope of *dharma* to render it capable of being built into the immense complexity of our everyday life. Early rising and bath, cleanliness and godliness, performance of *sandhyā* and meditation, recitation of *mantras*, worship of various gods, performance of *saṁskāras*—and especially the *śrāddha* which links the past with the present in an unbroken chain, frequenting holy places and seeking the company of holy men, practising of *tapas* and *yoga*, and service to parents—are some of the tiny rills which feed the mighty river of *dharma* and without which the latter will dry up. According to Rāma : "Truth, righteousness, prowess, kindness to creatures, fairspokenness and worship of the twice-born, gods and guests—these have been styled by the pious as *the way* to heaven" (II. 109. 31).

Although, strictly speaking, *dharma* is what is good for the soul, its dictates are in no way inimical to the welfare of the body. Rāma says that there is no inevitable clash between the good of the soul and the good of the body : "Just as a beloved wife is the con-centre of loveliness and love and links the generations each with each, even so *dharma* in fruition is the source of *artha* as well as *kāma*" (II. 21. 57).

Rituals, sacrifices, gifts, renunciation, studies, vows, penances and worship of gods were no doubt the characteristics of a religious life; and it was recognized that the development of personality was helped by them. But they were regarded as in consonance with *dharma* only if they issued out in various activities conducive to the welfare of all. If the spiritual power ensuing from them was employed for acquiring eventual mastery over others and exploiting them for selfish gains, the ruler was called upon to order denunciation and destruction. Thus, "the very Rāma who fought for protecting the rituals of *ṛsis* like Viśvāmitra in the forest was forced to order the destruction of Meghanāda after obstructing his rituals and thus cutting off the source of his invincible power."[2]

The ideal of *dharma* held in the age is best exemplified by Vālmīki in a series of difficult, baffling and tragic situations and showing how his principal characters react to them, and ultimately tide over them without in any way swerving from the highest principles of spiritual life laid down in the scriptures. "In Vibhīṣaṇa, as in Prahlāda, we have a signal example of *dharma* manifesting itself, transcending the limitations imposed by demoniacal birth, by natural affection towards relatives, the king and the country...If Rāvaṇa represents divine grace and higher elements in heredity getting dissipated in self-aggrandizement, Vibhīṣaṇa stands for the heroic soul's clinging to *dharma*, overcoming systematically the baser elements in heredity and the numerous temptations and dangers of a vicious environment."[1] Hanumān, though belonging to the comparatively less civilized Vānara race, feels drawn irresistibly to the feet of Rāma who instantly becomes his chosen spiritual ideal, his heart and soul to the promotion of whose welfare he dedicates. Vālī's final reconciliation with Sugrīva and repentance for his iniquities, and Sugrīva's own regret at having contrived for the death of his brother who had generously let him off alive after many a combat, have a poignant appeal of their own and show the noble heights of *dharma* to which these heroic souls could soar. In Daśaratha, wielding mighty temporal power but too God-fearing to revoke his promise of boons to a wife even at the risk of fatal separation from what he calls "his externally moving life," is a unique example of adherence at all costs and in all circumstances to the moral values which give meaning and sanctity to life. In the characterization of Kausalyā, Vālmīki presents an immortal picture of ideal Hindu wife, having intense emotions and yet controlling them with self-abnegation and resigning unquestioningly to "what fate has decreed as a results of past *karma*." By her life and actions, Kausalyā represents *hrī* among the three norms indicated in the Rāmāyaṇa (*viz*., *hrī*, *śrī* and *kīrti*, I. 15. 20), and it shows itself in her moral restraint, piety and modesty. In Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa is the fragrance of *dharma* unfolding itself in the shape of irreproachable brotherly love, devotion and submissiveness to an elder brother. Thus, if Lakṣmaṇa remains sleepless at nights (II. 51. 9), acts faithfully as a servant and a bodyguard, and considers unwavering dedication to Rāma's welfare the best of paths for his own spiritual advancement, Bharata too expresses identical feelings when he condemns the manners of his mother, voluntarily taking to the life of an ascetic and ruling the country in Rāma's name, with the latter's sandals on the throne symbolizing his presence during the exile. Sītā is depicted as the noblest flower of Indian womanhood, the quintessence of *strī-dharma* as conceived in that age. Accepting the lofty canons of conjugal life, she remains true to her lord in thought, word and deed, in spite of the numerous trials and tribulations she has to undergo. Whether during her captivity at Laṅkā, or in the ordeal of fire, whether abandoned in the forest, carrying Rāma's burden in her womb, or called upon to adduce proofs of her innocence a second time before the people, Sītā, the perfect wife that she was, bore patiently her agonies and performed her proper duty by praying continually for the welfare of Rāma and his subjects, being convinced that her virtuous husband thus treated her harshly only for upholding the impossible *dharma* of a king (VII. 48).

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[1] *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. ii, p. 39.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

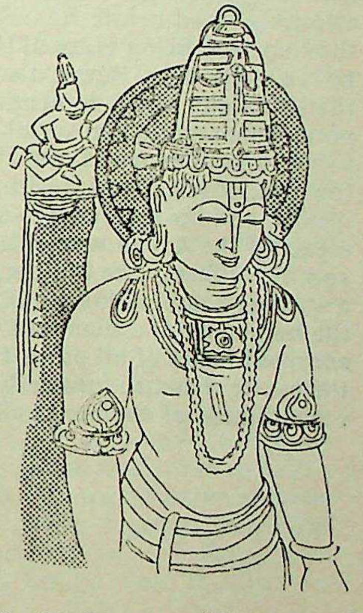

Fig. 108. Rāma ; twelfth-fourteenth century A.D. (Mana, Madhya Pradesh).

As for Rāma, he may rightly be looked upon as the chief bastion of *dharma* of the period (*dharmabhṛtām varam*, III. 7. 7). *Dharma-jyeṣṭha* (II. 12. 17), eminent in *dharma*, is the significant epithet that Kausalyā uses with reference to her son. To the power-mad Kaikeyī, he declared : "I am not eager to live in this world, O lady, hankering after wealth (*artha*). Know me to be equal to the sages, completely withdrawn solely and firmly established in *dharma*" (II. 19. 20). He was, in the Vedāntic language, a *jīvanmukta*; witness Vālmīki's eloquent description of him when faced with the unenviable prospect of repairing to the wilderness leaving his rightful kingdom: "Loss of kingdom could not diminish the great beauty of that beloved of the people on account of its everlasting pleasantness like unto the moon. There was manifest in him no change of mind even when circumstances forced him to flee as an exile to the forest and leave the world like unto one emancipated while yet living...None ever perceived any sign of mental agony on the face of Rāma. Like unto the rays of the moon, brilliant in the autumn, that hero of mighty arms, having control over himself, never forsook his native cheerfulness" (II. 19. 32 7). Another testimony to Rāma's sedateness of soul and equanimity of mind comes from Bharata: "Who is there in this world like unto thee? Pain doth not afflict thee nor pleasure exhilarate...Living like unto dead, and existing like unto non-existing, what shall make a person attaining thine intellectual state ever grieve? He that like unto thee understands the nature of soul and its environment cannot grieve if he comes by the worst of calamities. Thou resemblest, O Rāghava, the very gods in strength and art magnanimous, truthful in promise, knowest everything and art endued with the highest wisdom" (II. 106. 2-5). There are occasions in the Rāmāyaṇa when the great sages and celestials stand before Rāma with folded palms and urge him to remember that he is the Supreme Being Himself (VI. 117). But he seldom moves from the position that he is a mere man, Rāma, a son of Daśaratha (II. 117. 11). Many and intricate were the situations which confronted him throughout his chequered career, but there was none which made him shrink or which he would not endeavour to solve, not through some superhuman aid but through the application of his own human resources (mental, physical and spiritual) nor would he ever flag in his regard for truth and justice, and his readiness to sacrifice his interests for the welfare of others. The high ideals of the Aryan way of living were embodied in Rāma, the faithful and dutiful son, the affectionate brother, the loving husband and the stern, relentless hero—a strange combination, as Bhavabhūti puts it, of the sensitiveness of a flower and the harshness of a diamond.[1] Vālmīki may not have stressed the now universally accepted belief of all pious Hindus that Rāma was an incarnation of God, nonetheless he has unequivocally and vividly brought out the truism that Rāma was an embodiment of *dharma* in all its manifold aspects (III. 37. 13).

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[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 40-1.

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[1] *Uttara-rāma-carita*, Act i.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GOLDEN AGE

The Rāmāyaṇa culture as depicted by Vālmīki can help one form an adequate impression of the state of society in those remote days. The picture given by the poet is brilliant, even dazzling at times. It does not, however, mean that the picture is untarnished by any dark or nonflattering patches. Human society in no age or clime has ever been a perfect or all-round pattern of virtue, and the society depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa is no exception to the rule. But even without denying that this story of an ancient people was not altogether exemplary, it must be conceded that Vālmīki presents a picture of Indian life at its best, and we may justly glory in the achievements of our ancestors in the varied branches of culture and civilization.

Summing up the outstanding characteristics of the Rāmāyaṇa culture, it may be said that it was upheld and maintained by means of a social structure in which the people were divided into, but, what is more important to remember, not antagonized by, *varṇas*. It was a system in which a man devotes the first part of his life to a disciplined acquirement of knowledge, secular and scriptural, and thereafter marries, lives the life of a good citizen and rears a family, and when advanced in years retires from worldly activity and devotes himself solely to matters spiritual. It was a society in which the Brāhmaṇas enjoyed a respected and somewhat privileged position primarily because of their spirit of renunciation and mental and spiritual contribution to the welfare of humanity. The Kṣatriyas submitted to their spiritual authority and governed the realm in accordance with traditional morality. The Vaiśyas augmented the national wealth by trade and commerce, while the Śūdras served the other *varṇas*. The special privileges assigned in the Rāmāyaṇa to the various *varṇas* were really intended to secure for them the best environment and circumstances calculated to enable all classes to carry on their respective functions to the best of their ability. Transition from one caste to another was possible though not always quite easy. The disabilities of the Śūdras increased only between the genuine Rāmāyaṇa and the Uttarakāṇḍa. In spite of a few legends smacking of caste jealousy, it must be said to the credit of the architects of the Rāmāyaṇa culture that, generally, all the *varṇas* lived in harmony and amity, and in this the personality of the king played an important part.

The joint family, no doubt, had its difficulties, but these could be overcome by concord and affection among the family members and by loyalty to past traditions. In fact, the family appears to have served as a training ground for the inculcation of self-sacrifice. The unquestioned authority of the father, the affection and respect for the mother and the exalted place for the eldest among the sons are a feature of the Rāmāyaṇa period, which continues to be faithfully adhered to by the modern Hindu society to a considerable extent.

It is remarkable that the marriage system of the day was at once orthodox and liberal, ideal as well as practical. According to the Aryan ideal of marriage, two persons were united for purposes far beyond their immediate gratification and so there was little scope for courting or personal selection. Boys and girls abided by the parents' ruling in the matter of marriage. The rites of nuptial ceremony are suggestive of the entire psychology of mutual relationship between husband and wife. The marriage tie was irrevocable—here and hereafter. It is, however, refreshing to note that this rigidity of idealism is relieved by the liberality exercised in allowing matrimonial alliances in the interests of a bright and virile race. Post-puberty marriages, inter-caste alliances, and absence of specific bar on marriage between the high and the low invest the Rāmāyaṇa society with modern characteristics. Of course, the wide practice of polygamy was a reprehensible feature and occasionally gave cause for family discord; but we should not fail to notice the emphasis laid on the cherished ideal of monogamy. The ideal of love was lofty yet practicable; it was a fine blend of sensuousness and spirituality. The sexual element is, no doubt, a powerful factor; indeed, the love of man for woman is one of the crowning blessings of mundane life. Still it was realized that physical pleasure was not the be-all and end-all of marital life. A sane conjugal life with a full eye on racial continuity and one's duty towards religion, society and kinsmen could alone serve as a fit instrument for the realization of the three incentives or aims of material life.

Woman's personality was baffling and at the same time fascinating. She had to play the diverse roles of a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a wife, a mother, and (sometimes) of a widow. As a daughter, she caused her parents anxiety about her marital happiness; nevertheless, she was affectionately reared, properly educated and given sufficient freedom of movement. The unmarried maid was an object of good omen in society. Her virginity was jealously guarded. Her status in marriage differed with the different forms of marriage. As a young bride in her new home, she deserved and, in fact, obtained sympathetic treatment from her parents-in-law. As a wife, she was to observe unflinching fidelity towards her husband and worship him as a deity. Charming loveliness, coupled with unwavering service to the husband, was the hall-mark of a model wife. Chastity of mind and body and complete identity with her husband was the ideal of *pātivratya*. A wife enjoyed the rights of maintenance and protection, the right to property and the right of conjugal fidelity from her husband. As a widow, she was in no way an object of inauspiciousness and wasl oved and revered by her sons and daughters-in-law. The practice of *satī* was not prevalent. In view of the inherent weakness of her nature and frame, a woman was *asvatantra* (V. 9. 58)—*i.e.*, dependent on man and deserving of his protection; from the viewpoint of family stability and conjugal bliss, she was to be respected and honoured. A good wife could not be deserted, but the epic sanctions the repudiation of a vicious wife. The conservative notion of chastity made her quite abject when accused of infidelity.

Seclusion of women was practised though not insisted upon in emergencies. *Purdā* was absent among Aryans and Vānaras, though prevalent among Rakṣasas. In the company of her husband or members of her sex, woman was allowed sufficient measure of freedom. Courtezans existed more as an adjunct of royalty than as an instrument of general licence. Society was not amenable to the admittance of an abducted woman back to its fold.

Although the Rāmāyaṇa culture expects from a husband much mutual sympathy, affection and congeniality as between a wedded couple, still more is expected of a wife. At the same time, wife's status as a *saha-dharma-cāriṇī*—a colleague in religious rites and a comrade in social functions—points to the fact that man and woman were regarded as equals in responsibilities and partnership. A wife took an important part in her husband's counsels. She had the right to share penance with her husband. Intellectual woman like Sītā and Tārā have made noteworthy contributions to Indian culture. A woman could hold her own when her authority was sought to be set aside with impunity. The high respect enjoined towards a lady and the condemnation and punishment of the least offence against her sex naturally placed her on a pedestal of honour in the society. Man's desire for progeny to encompass his well-being hereafter made woman indispensable from the spiritual and religious points of view. Indeed, woman as a loving wife and tender mother—

that is, woman in her most natural and fairest calling—has nowhere else in life or literature found greater and more heart-felt appreciation. Being the inalienable self of the husband and his comrade in the pursuit of *dharma*, a wife enjoyed solicitous care and supreme authority in domestic life. The respect and even veneration that a chaste and devoted wife, reputed for her character, enjoyed in the Rāmāyaṇa age is unparalleled and is hardly less than that enjoyed by any great ascetic in history.[1] Always, she was the centre of happiness and the abode of grace. Her special qualities were grace and tenderness, peace and affection, surrender and sacrifice ; and absolute freedom from brutality, violence, anger, or hatred.

Though ethics and good conduct loom large in the life of Vālmīki's Aryans, still there is abundant evidence of the light side of human nature asserting itself. They realized that life was a symphony of many notes and its fulness would be jeopardized if any one of them was neglected or left out. The epic belies the glib criticism of ancient Indian life that it is saturated with an excessive dose of pessimistic religiosity and an utter disregard of material interests. Ancient Aryans had their *forte* not only in transcendental and metaphysical speculations but also in the management of the affairs of mundane life, the pursuit of secular interests and the enjoyment of comforts and luxuries of life. They helped themselves both to vegetarian and non-vegetarian food as well as to spirituous liquors ; nevertheless, abstemiousness in food and temperance in drink were preferred for leading a spiritual life. The art of cooking was advanced. Dinner etiquette was properly observed and eating was to be indulged more in a spirit of dedication to gods and guests than with a view to self-gratification.

Magnificence was maintained in matters of dress and ornaments, jewellery and flowers, toilet, cosmetics and unguents. Personal adornment both among men and women was fairly advanced and is an index to the aesthetic tastes of the age. The value of recreations to save life from being a humdrum existence was well appreciated. Temperance was tacitly followed in amusements, and people did not let their passion for pleasure run amuck to the detriment of social weal.

The towns and houses of the times show the people's taste and love of beauty in architecture, choice furniture and artistic decorations. Everything about the citizen—dress and ornaments, sport and pastime, charity and liberality, palaces and their architecture—bespeak an unstinted expenditure of wealth, highlighting the prosperity of the age. The society being characterized by very refined tastes, there was joy and beauty in life. Everyone aspiring to be the member of a cultured society had to acquire some proficiency in literary appreciation, music, painting and sculpture, and possess some knowledge of various arts.

The economic prosperity of the country was aided by the advantages of a good government. Agriculture, horticulture, cattle-rearing, trade and industry were widely cultivated, enabling a large section of people to enjoy the good things of life. There existed a close intercourse between towns, villages and hermitages, contributing to the unfolding of the society to a higher state of being. The cities of the period were at once impregnable forts and models of town-planning. A high civic sense was discernible among the people. The villages were prosperous and engaged in indigenous production, while the hermitages acted as the custodians of national culture.

The etiquette of the period was marked by polish and culture, amiable disposition, readiness to oblige and apologize, graceful and engaging manners, sweet blandishments and winsome ways ; and customs were guided by precedents, a sense of dignity, consideration for social goodwill and necessities of a corporate existence,

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[1] S. Radhakrishnan (Ed.) : *op. cit.*, p. 80.

No doubt, a few superstitious beliefs were nursed by the populace.

Vālmīki's theory of education was based on the efficacy of heredity or nature rather than of training or nurture. The function of teaching was performed by hermits in their *āśramas*. In the metropolis existed centres of secular culture also. The teacher was an object of high reverence, and obedience to his commands was an article of faith with the student. Writing was not much in vogue, and study was fortified by memorizing and *svādhyāya*. Hints are available of the prevalence of high female education (perhaps in the *āśramas*). The extent of knowledge was wide and liberal, and brisk intellectual activity is evidenced by the epic. The system of education generally catered for the intellectual, moral, material and spiritual requirements of a man's all-round development.

Above all, the entire concept of life was embedded in deep religious and moral feeling. Love of righteousness at whatever cost was the lodestar that guided the Rāmāyaṇa Aryans throughout their life. The plethora of rituals and ceremonies was saved from becoming a pseudo-religion by the warmth of faith in, and active endeavour at, striving towards whatever was noble, good and great. The theory of *karma*, and the belief in fate, made the people pious and God-fearing. "This world is God's by right, ours only by sufferance"—appears to have been the simple principle that made one realize that men are here only by sufferance of the Divine power, that men are not choosers even of their own lot (let alone other people's destinies), and that men have to play their part, however brief, in the right direction and to the best of their abilities in the stupendous drama of creation. Self-improvement alone leads to social improvement.

Austerity, study of the Vedas, liberality to the needy, hospitality, and adoration of the manes constituted strands of piety. Great catholicity in the matter of worship seems to have prevailed, and bigoted sectarianism of later times was out of question. Asceticism was in the air and, besides confirmed ascetics of various orders, every pious man and woman exhibited ascetic traits in his or her daily routine.

In brief, the Rāmāyaṇa culture has in it the elements of greatness and abiding value. Since it held the scales even between the spiritual and the material in man, its efflorescence was marked in every aspect of life and bore fruit in most cases. The ideals it lived for were a happy family, a well-ordered social life, and a State functioning with the moral code of justice, and the well-being of its people. The moral and intellectual culture of the inhabitants of Ayodhyā corresponded to their material welfare. The poet, while recounting the marvels of Rāma's reign, the dream of society down the ages, declares it to be the reign of justice, virtue and goodness—a veritable golden age in which mankind, healthy in body and mind, surrounded by numerous progeny and the good things of life, was happy, content, prosperous and righteous :[1]

> Disease or famine ne'er oppressed
> His happy people richly blest
> With all the joys of ample wealth,
> Of sweet content and perfect health.
> No widow mourned her well-loved mate,
> No sire his son's untimely fate.
> They feared not storm or robber's hand ;
> No fire or flood laid waste the land ;
> The Golden Age had come again
> To bless the days of Rāma's reign.[2]

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[1] See I. 1. 90-4 ; VI. 128. 98-104.

[2] Griffith's translation.

CHAPTER XXV

THE IMPACT

The crucial test of the abiding worth of any literary work is whether or not it vitally influences the life of the people whose culture it claims to enshrine. Judged by this standard, it may be asserted without fear of contradiction that the culture of the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, unlike that of the epics of Greece and Rome, has not become a part of the lumber of history. It has, on the other hand, woven itself into the warp and woof of the nation from millennium to millennium and is still a living force in the life of its people. The influence it has exerted upon them reaching down to the lowest strata of the society is literally, and in actual fact, immense, continuous and pervasive : something that could hardly be said of any other class of literary or religious compositions anywhere. As superbly put by M. N. Dutt : "Truly of the Rāmāyaṇa it can be said in Baconian language that it has come home to the business and bosoms of all men."

The great heroes and heroines of the epic have become more real in India than historial personages elsewhere. Expressions embodying the memories of incidents in the epic pass current amongst all ranks of the people, being mouthed alike by high and low, by prince and peasant, by the community at large. Along with the Hindī *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulasīdāsa, the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki represents the household literature of India and, with the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas, has formed the general medium of popular education. It enshrines the models upon which character is moulded and it is through its popularity that Brahmanical culture has deeply permeated this vast country. It represents the typical Indian method of catering for varying degrees of cultural development, from the highest intellectual to the simple and untaught rustic. It makes us grasp somewhat the secret of the ancient Indians in holding together a variegated society divided in many ways and graded in many castes, in harmonizing their discords and giving them a common background of heroic tradition and abundant living. It has tried deliberately to build up a unity of outlook among the people which was to survive and overshadow all diversity.[1] It is in this way that the whole nation has been raised to a level of high "cultivation" without feeling the necessity of universal literacy.[2]

The reverence for, and popularity of, the Rāmāyaṇa even outside the limits of the mother-country, in regions that are coming to be increasingly known as Further or Greater India, have not been least significant. "No work of literature has spread over such a vast area as that poem of knightly honour, self-denial, and love of husband and wife."[3] As if in prophetic anticipation of its destiny, its author claimed that the story he was going to tell would be current among men "as long as the hills stand and the rivers flow" (I. 2. 36-7). But even he could not have foreseen the many-sided expression it has found in the immense range of sculpture, inscriptions, music, dance and drama, not only in the land of its birth but also beyond our borders—in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Indo-China and Burma. Through the centuries, this story of a prince of a royal house in what is now Oudh has stirred the emotions and lighted up the creative imagination of many who were not of his race or religion, who did not acknowledge his divinity and to whom the country where he passed his days was probably little more than a name. To this day, the Rāmāyaṇa remains as a living tradition in the *wajang* or shadow plays of Java, the dances of Thailand and the folk-drama of Burma. There Rāma is held in honour and his epic story in the original Sanskrit, in adaptations or imitations, enthrals audiences. The legend of Rāma continues to be popular in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and other parts of Indo-China, and constitutes one of the most important sources of indigenous art and literature in these countries. The evidence of the epigraphy, architecture and sculpture of these countries testifies to the widespread appeal of the Rāmāyaṇa in Indo-China dating back to very early times.[1]

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[1] Cf. Jawaharlal Nehru : *The Discovery of India*, p. 103.

[2] A. Coomaraswamy : *Rajput Painting*, p. 59.

[3] P. Masson-Oursel : *Ancient India and Indian Civilization*, p. 259.

We would be repaying a debt to history if we found means of "commemorating" this great work. All the different versions and translations, together with other poems and prose works on the Rāmāyaṇa theme, produced in India alone, would by themselves make a sizable library. If to these are added the Ramakien from Thailand, the versions of the Rāmāyaṇa in old Javanese and the other Rāmāyaṇa poem and references found in inscriptions in Indo-China and elsewhere, the result would be a rich collection of variations on a single theme probably unequalled in the world for its range and artistry. But even this would be incomplete without illustrations of the story in the plastic arts of Java, Thailand and Indo-China. If copies of all these, together with the different editions and versions of the poem itself, could be housed in a Rāmāyaṇa Museum, it would be not only a fitting tribute to a great poet but deservedly a unique centre of historical and artistic interest into the bargain.

In order to have a comprehensive picture of the history of Indian people through 3,000 years, it is proper to attempt an assessment of the influence that the Rāmāyaṇa has exerted on the different aspects of our national culture. The Rāmāyaṇa has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists without number, a pattern to all subsequent aspirants to the poet's mantle (*param kavīnām ādhāram*). With a thrilling narration, a simple metre and tone, no wonder the epic should have formed a model for all future writers. There has scarcely been a poet in ancient or medieval India who has not derived inspiration from Vālmīki's fount and "in debt" imparted to the subject some stamp of his genius and fancy. It has always been looked upon as the first and foremost epic poem (*mahākāvya*) in Sanskrit literature. In fact, the very definition of a *mahākāvya* has been evolved in India from this first and superb example, even as in western poetic the definition of an epic poem has been evolved from the *Iliad.* By its fervour and popularity, it has not only directed but even restricted the course of subsequent literature to one uniform channel. Woven as it is round one hero and with few complications or digressions—and having the further advantage of being concise and compact, quite systematic and poetic—the Rāmāyaṇa has unfailingly formed the model for the later poets to emulate ; unlike the *Mahābhārata*, where complicated bulk has made it a source of inspiration more than of emulation. Though its recitativity gradually lost its force with the efflux of time, and its language too wore down to variations and modifications—the post-epic poets continued to copy its metrical model and draw freely from its subject-matter and plot.

Apart from the fact that some account of the life of Rāma is found in the *Mahābhārata* and in almost all the Purāṇas, the number of poems and dramas directly based on the Rāmāyaṇa is almost a legion. All later poets look upon

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[1] K. A. Nilakantha Sastri : *The Rāmāyaṇa in Greater India* (*Journal of Oriental Research*, vol. vi, part 2, p. 120).

Vālmīki with a sort of filial reverence. A study of his works makes it amply clear that "it is in the *ādi-kavi's kāvya* that Kālidāsa soaked himself and it is with the thoughts and words of Vālmīki that Kālidāsa again and again enriches his fancy and expression."[1] Bhavabhūti has not only used whole verses of Vālmīki in his works but has also paid glowing tribute to the author for his inspiration by saying that poetic "sense hastens to follow the utterances of such early sages" (*Uttara.*, 1). According to Rājaśekhara, even Vyāsa was a student of Vālmīki. Poet after poet delved into the same ocean for pearls. Aśvaghoṣa, though a Buddhist, based his portrayal of Siddhārtha in the *Buddhacarita* largely on the Rāma of the Rāmāyaṇa. The influence of the Rāmāyaṇa is also discernible in Bhaṭṭi, Bhāravi, the Prākrit poet Āḍhyarāja and Bāṇa. When such eminent poets are proud of their indebtedness to this prime author of poetry, it is no wonder that lesser writers freely (not necessarily with acknowledgment) draw their inspiration from his composition.

It should be noted, however, that the later writers of Sanskrit *kāvya* unfortunately miscalculated, since "at the time they wrote the Sanskrit of the epics was further and further being removed from the contemporary form it had assumed in the meanwhile. A direct appeal to the reader was now out of question. So we find in all these later works—known as the classical Sanskrit literature—a lack of the natural ease and charm and flow of the epics. Secondly, a deliberate attempt to make up for that loss by artificial means like extravagance and ostentation...In spite of this incidental divergence, classical Sanskrit literature remained as near the epic model as possible."[2]

The influence of the Rāmāyaṇa on the provincial literature(s) of India has been in no way less considerable and constitutes a separate study by itself. When the modern languages of India were being evolved from the ancient Sanskrit(s) and Prākrits in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D., the Rāmāyaṇa had the greatest influence in inspiring poets and savants. Southern India took the lead, and a translation of the Rāmāyaṇa in Tamil appeared as early as 1100 A.D. In course of time, Northern India and Bengal and Bombay also followed the example. Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmacaritamānasa* is a great classic in the Hindī language which, with its ideal standard of ethics, is the norm of conduct to a vast majority of people of Northern India, literate and illiterate alike. Kṛttivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* is a classic in Bengal and Śridhara's in Marāṭhī. Generation after generation of Hindus in all parts of India has studied the ancient story in a modern "translation." And, indeed, the expression and integration of human feeling and attitudes in the larger background of nature is one of the leading notes in Indian literature handed down from the Araṇyakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa.[3]

The Rāmāyaṇa has made its influence felt from another point of view also. As we have seen, it formed a charming recitation at the hands of those prime rhapsodists, Kuśa and Lava who thus became the forerunners of hosts of balladists through hundreds of years. Public recitations of the Rāmāyaṇa have continued through the ages with pious regularity, the earliest recorded example being that in Kumāralāta's *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā* of the second century A.D. Reciters still delight the hearts of myriads at the Rāma-navamīs annually at Vārāṇasī[4] and Mathurā[5] (fig. 109).

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1. V. Raghavan : *Vālmīki and Kālidāsa* (K. V. Rangaswami Com. Vol., p. 412).
2. R. V. Jagirdar : *Drama in Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 9-10.
3. Radhakamal Mukerji : *The Social Influence of Art*, p. 173.
4. A. A. Macdonell : *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 317.
5. W. Ridgeway : *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*, p. 132.

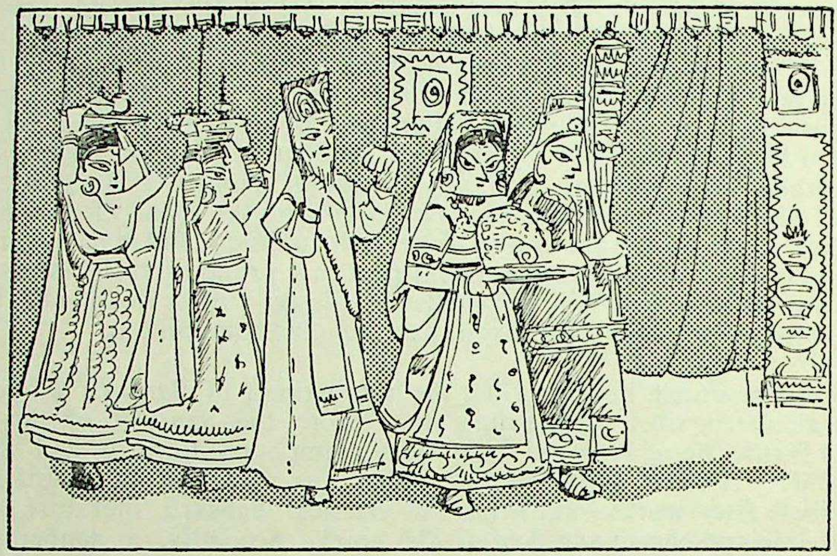

Fig. 109. Sītā arriving for *svayaṁvara* (the girl's selection of a husband) in the Little Ballet Troupe's puppet dance-drama, "*The Rāmāyaṇa*."

Then, the Rāmāyaṇa has been an inspiration for Sanskrit dramatists too, from the earliest days. "The purpose of the epic, *viz.*, to turn literature into art—a path of roses to charm and appreciation of joy and beauty—this purpose was carried into the dramas."[1] The story of the Rāmāyaṇa is more human in outlook and treatment, in contrast with the mythology of the Vedic hymns or with the Upaniṣadic discussions. Its introduction of life-like incidents and emotions was retained in the dramas as far as borrowing their plots from or modelling them upon those in the epic. Most of the original features of the epic—*viz.*, narration and description—are borrowed by the Sanskrit dramatic literature. The element of "super-naturalism" (fantastic story, superhuman heroes, semi-divine being and demons of evil and darkness) to be found in the epic literature was retained not only by the later *kāvya* works but also to an appreciable extent by the *nāṭaka* literature. The introduction of the Prākrits, *i.e*, spoken dialects, in the Sanskrit drama may also be regarded as just a tendency borrowed from the epics, since to write in a style near the spoken idiom was first attempted by the epics.[2] According to Keith, "There is every reason to believe that it was through the use of epic recitations that latent possibilities of drama were evoked and the literary form created."[3]

In the plays ascribed to Bhāsa, there are some based on the episodes of the Rāma-story, *viz*, *Bālacarita*, *Abhiṣeka* and *Pratimā*. They cover between them the whole of the Rāma-story. They are so essentially based on the epic style and subject-matter that it would not be unreasonable to hold that they represent the earliest stage of the Sanskrit drama. Their deviations from the rules of Pāṇini become reasonably understandable when we remember that they were written in the popular style of the epics. Narration and description, as in the epics, form their essential feature.

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1. R. V. Jagirdar: *op. cit.*, p. 14.
2. *Op. cit.*
3. *Sanskrit Drama*, p. 27.

After Bhāsa, there were practically no plays based on the epic stories ; even with him, the *Mahābhārata* was more popular than the Rāmāyaṇa. As late as the seventh century A.D., Bhavabhūti based two of his three plays—*Mahāvīracarita* and *Uttararāmacarita*—on the Rāma-story. That is why in the former the actor asks the stage-manager in the prologue what part of the story is to be staged, since such a venture (*viz.*, a dramatic version of the epic Rāmāyaṇa) is so unusual. Bhavabhūti exhibits his greatness by daring to introduce changes in the interpretation of the story as handed down by the epic tradition. He correctly sensed the defects of earlier plays (not Bhāsa's) dealing with stereotyped love-themes (*e.g.*, those of King Harṣa) ; and, as it were, telling his audience that he was tired of sickly love stories, presented a play "depicting the heroic sentiments of cultured minds, a clash of characters and the subtleties thereof." To him, drama was essentially a social study, a presentation of the ways of the world (*lokacarita*) we see around us. Though the story is old, no doubt, it is entirely new in the way it is presented. His two plays cover between them the life-story of Rāma from his education and marriage up to his second reunion with Sītā. Herein the dramatist attempts to interpret—not merely to narrate—the life and actions of Rāma in the background of the changed "outlook" prevailing in his own "contemporary" society and surroundings.

In the final stages of the Sanskrit drama, the influence of the Rāmāyaṇa is again a noteworthy feature, as instanced by the *Kundamālā* of Diṅnāga (or Dhīranāga), the *Bālarāmāyaṇa* of Rājaśekhara, the *Anargharāghava* of Murāri, the *Prasannarāghava* of Jayadeva and the *Jānakipariṇaya* of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita. Murāri, acknowledging the indebtedness of Sanskrit dramatists to the Rāmāyaṇa, says: "How this good composition of Vālmīki has been the joint-stock capital for all writer-merchants."[1] It is only after the tenth century A.D. that for the first time after Bhāsa we come across a few plays based on the story of the *Mahābhārata*. But whereas Bhāsa and Bhavabhūti have dramatized episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa, the later dramatists have simply narrated or re-written the Rama-story in the *campū* (prose-poetry) style with the puranic atmosphere for a background.

As the tale of Troy and the fortunes of the heroes who destroyed that town provide the chief themes for the Greek tragedians, Aeschylus himself declaring that his plays were but "joints from the banquet of Homer," so did the Rāmāyaṇa not only furnish the chief plots for the classical Sanskrit drama but even to this day supplies the most popular themes for the playwrights of India, demonstrating thus that the close connection between the Greek epic and the Greek drama, so strongly emphasized by Aristotle, is no less true of the epic drama of Hindustan.[2] Dramatic versions of the story of Rāma, as mentioned in the *Harivaṁśa* and popularly known as *rāma-līlās*, are still enacted by amateur companies at religious festivals in villages and towns all over the nation. Especially during the popular festival of Rāma-navarātras in the months of Caitra and Āśvina (March-April and October-November), numberless people year after year are kept enthralled by stage-performances of episodes from the epic, closing finally with the effigies of Rāvaṇa, Meghanāda and Kumbhakarṇa going up in flames (symbolizing the ultimate triumph of good over evil).

No survivals of "ancient" Rāmāyaṇa painting, however, have been left for our edification, except the consummate manner in which Bhavabhūti introduces them in his *Uttararāmacarita* to intensify the pathos of the opening act of his play. Still specimens of painting belonging to the medieval period, fortunately, have been preserved in the different museums of India. Could we survey the whole development of Indian painting from the beginning to the end, we would find the Rāmāyaṇa (and the *Mahābhārata*) constantly providing its themes recurrently. The India Office Library in London possesses several pages of an illustrated Rāmāyaṇa of considerable interest. Several scenes from the epic have been illustrated in the paintings of the Rajput school whose period may be taken from the beginning of the thirteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century A.D. A beautiful illustrated manuscript of the Persian translation of the Rāmāyaṇa (1585 A.D.), with 176 pictures encased in gold linings, is preserved today in the Pothīkhānā of Jaipur. The Jodhpur Museum has a collection of 91 paintings on the Rāmāyaṇa drawn nearly a hundred years ago. A mural from Cochin presents vividly Rāma and Sugrīva shaking hands in friendship (fig. 46).[1]

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[1] *Aho sakala-kavi-sārtha-sādhāraṇī khalu iyam vālmīkīyā subhāṣita-nīvī.*

[2] W. Ridgeway : *op. cit.*, p. 131.

How considerable was the influence exerted by the Rāmāyaṇa on the fine arts of Greater India can be assessed by the copious evidence available from Kamboja, the neighbour of Campā. In the Musee Khmer at Phnom-Penh are preserved ten groups of ancient paintings depicting episodes from the Cambodian version of the Rāmāyaṇa—scenes like Janaka finding Sītā, Rāma breaking the bow of Śiva and his encounter with Paraśurāma while on his way back to Ayodhyā after marriage.[2]

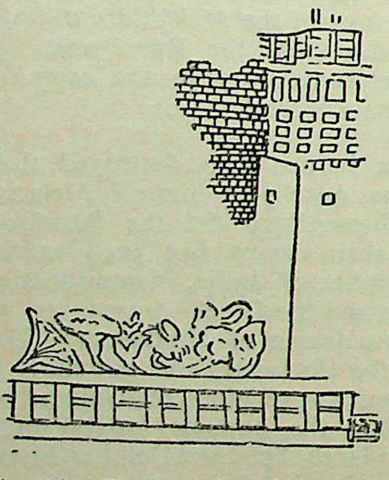

Fig. 110. The moat (*parikhā*) ; Sāñcī, first century B. C.

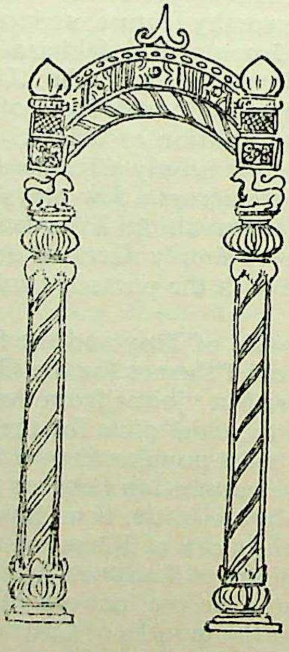

Fig. 111. Richly decorated *toraṇa*; Amarāvatī, s,econd century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

The early architecture of India seems to bear the stamp of the marvellous descriptions of cities and palaces in the Rāmāyaṇa.[3] Says Vālmīki, in describing Laṅkā, that surrounding the impregnable wall of the city was a large moat (*parikhā*) adorned with lotuses (V. 2. 14)—a detail which is faithfully brought out in early representations of the moat at Sāñcī and elsewhere (fig. 110). Beyond the moat was the *parikhā* putting up a defence-line for the mansion of Rāvaṇa (V. 4. 25-6). This description is corroborated by the high wall shown in the early sculptures, sometimes with zigurat patterns on top (as at Sāñcī) and sometimes with a plain top line (as at Amarāvatī, fig. 96). The *aṭṭa*, *prākāra* and *toraṇa* of Laṅkā, too, find echo in the early sculptures at Sāñcī, Amarāvatī and elsewhere, and are described in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya. The *toraṇa* of Laṅkā, decorated with creeper-patterns all of gold (V. 8. 7), are imitated in a *toraṇa* from Amarāvatī showing leaves as entwining the *stambhas* or jamba (fig. 111 and 112). Actual designs are observable in plenty on the jamba of the *toraṇas* at Sāñcī.

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[1] C. Sivaramamurti : *Sanskrit Literature and Art—Mirrors of Indian Culture*, p. 70.

[2] K. A. Nilakantha Sastri : *op. cit.*, p. 119.

[3] See C. Sivaramamurti : *Some Architectural Passages in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Journal of Oriental Research*, vol. iii, part 2, pp. 87-9).

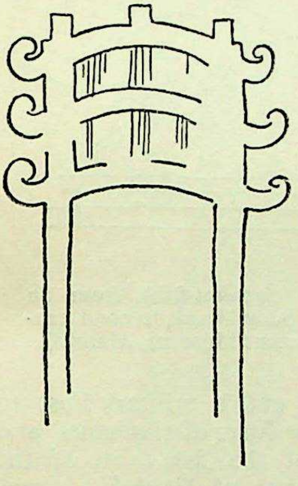

Fig. 112. *Jāla-toraṇa* (trellised gateway); Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

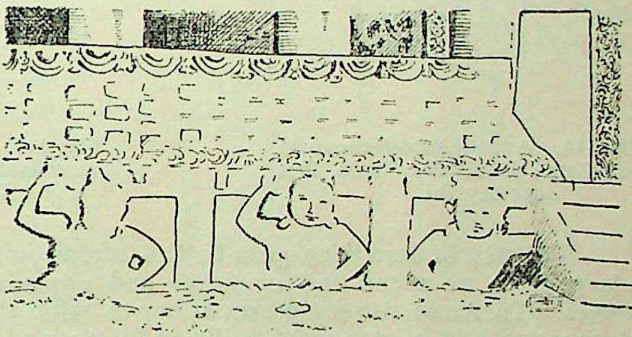

Fig. 113. Caryatid Yakṣas supporting Nasik cave 3; Sātavāhana, second century A.D. (Western India).

The early representations of Lakṣmī being bathed by elephants, as seen in Bharhut, Bodhagayā, Amarāvatī, Udayagiri and other places, are reminiscent of Vālmīki's description of the Puṣpaka showing Lakṣmī on lotus, with a lotus in hand and attended by elephants, carved on it (V. 7. 14). On the *toraṇa* gateway of Sāñcī, the goddess Lakṣmī is very often represented seated as well as standing (fig. 54).

Cave No. 3 of Nasik represents as supporting the structure a whole row of goblin figures (as conceived by Vālmīki) upholding the Puṣpaka as it roamed through the aerial regions (V. 8. 7; fig. 113). The epic describes them as adorned with *kuṇḍalas* and as pot-bellied, details faithfully observed in the Nasik sculptures as also in most caryatide figures of dwarfs from Sāñcī and Bharhut.

The *īhāmṛgas* (quaint animals, productions of variegated sculptural fancy), referred to by Vālmīki as decorating the pillars of the Puṣpaka (V. 9. 13), are used in all early sculptures of Bharhut, Sāñcī, Bodhagayā, Mathurā, Amarāvatī and a host of other places. Horses, elephants and bulls—part equine, elephantine and bovine, respectively, but with the hind shaped after the fish with lovely scales, fins and tail—are pleasantly of fanciful (fig. 55). Wings shooting from the root of the forelegs of elephants, lions and the like make up aerial monsters that couch on the pillar of capitals (fig. 55). The griffin, a monster with aquiline beak and leonine body, is one more of their animals of imagination (fig. 55). The aquatic monsters are generally shown under the feet of human figures carved on the shaft of pillars (fig. 114). In the Rāmāyaṇa, there are descriptions with special names for these fantastic creatures (fig. 55).[1]

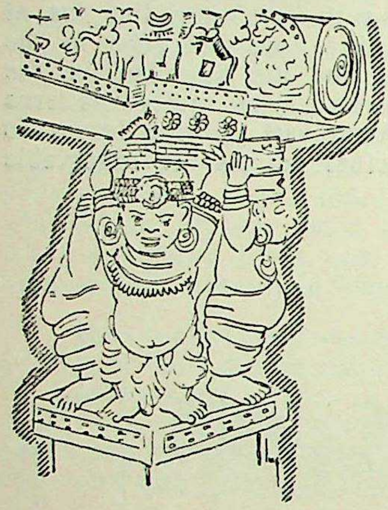

Fig. 114. Aquatic monsters carved on pillars ; Sāñcī, Sātavāhana, first century B.C.

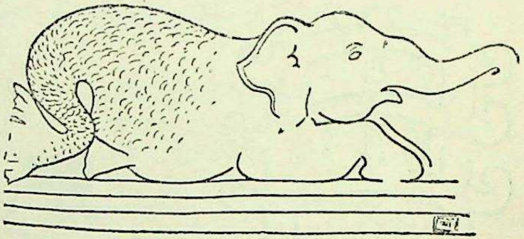

Fig. 115. *Īhāmṛga* (elephant-fish), from an Amarāvatī railing ; Sātavāhana, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Vālmīki, in describing grim battles, often compares the entire military host to a large river or ocean full of fishes and crocodiles in the form of elephants and horses. There are also sculptures of horses with the tail of the fish, and of the elephant with its hinder part fish-like in form ; and suggestions of Vālmīki's fancy may have roused curiosity in the sculptor's mind as to how the figure would appear if actually shaped in permanent material. *Gajavaktra-jhaṣas* (elephant-faced fishes) and *mīnavājins* (fish-formed horses) are mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* (fig. 115).[2]

Further, there is a verse in Vālmīki saying that *nārī-pravekas* (lovely representations of women) adorned the pillars of the Puṣpaka (V. 7. 7), which can best be understood only when the figures that abound in the pillars and pilasters from Jaggayyapeṭṭa and Mathurā, especially the Bhuvaneśvara Temples showing the fine Yakṣīs, are studied along with this verse as commentary (fig. 116). Likewise, his description of the Puṣpaka borne as it were by excellent geese (V. 7. 7), seems to represent an early sculpture from Amarāvatī wherein, under the pillars and pilasters, the plinth of the palace is decorated with a frieze of geese (fig. 117). Other examples frequently occur at Ghaṇṭaśālā and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. As for row of geese, there is no better example than the Aśokan pillar, while the geese with the lotus stalk occur quite commonly in the medieval sculptures at Belur and Halebid.[3] In the Vijayanagar Temples, too, the motif is often repeated. Vālmīki also describes lavishly the materials used for fashioning these figures and costliest coral and gems are named (V. 7. 13). The sculptured geese with fluttering wings and with lotuses and garlands in their beak answer Vālmīki's description of swans with curved wings sportively drooped and with auspicious bills and wings. Lotuses and garlands are auspicious, and beaks carrying them may also be so. The wings of the birds were

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1. See VI. 51. 27-8 ; also see C. Sivaramamurti : *Sanskrit Literature and Art—Mirrors of Indian Culture*, p. 2.
2. C. Sivaramamurti : *Amarāvatī Sculptures*, p. 93.
3. *Op. cit.*, plate 1, fig. 2.

decorated with coral and gold flowers, and the patterns worked in the sculptured wings of birds tally with the description.[1]

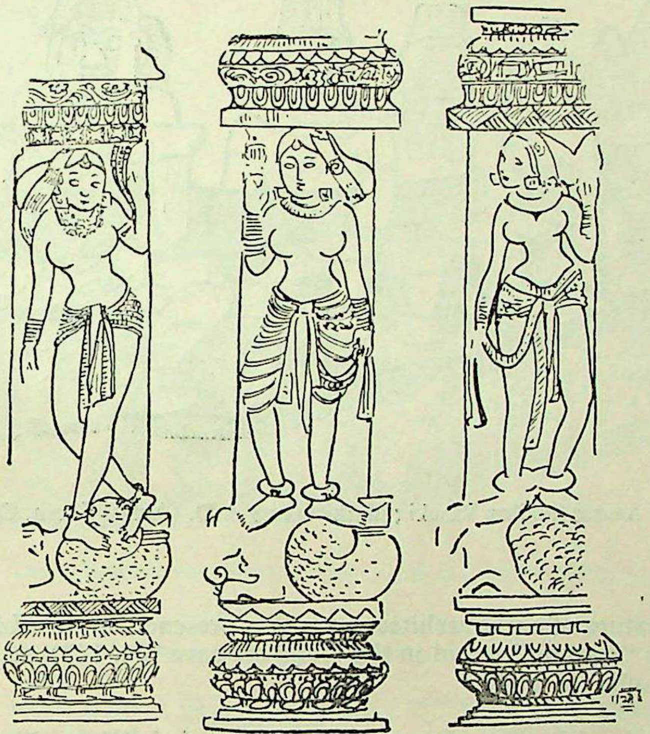
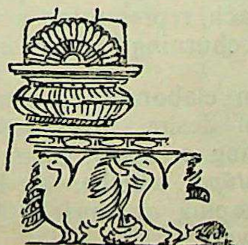


Fig. 116. Female figures adorning the pilasters on the casing slabs of the *stūpa* at Jaggayyapeṭṭa, second century A.D.



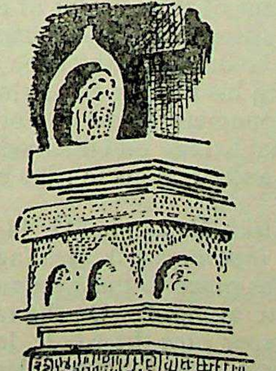


Fig. 117. The plinth of a palace decorated with a frieze of geese; Amarāvatī, second century A.D.

Fig. 118. *Jāla-vātāyana* (trellised windows); Koṇḍaṇe cave, *c.* first century A.D.

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[1] See C. Sivaramamurti: *Some Architectural Passages in the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Journal of Oriental Research*, vol. iii, part 2, pp. 91-2).

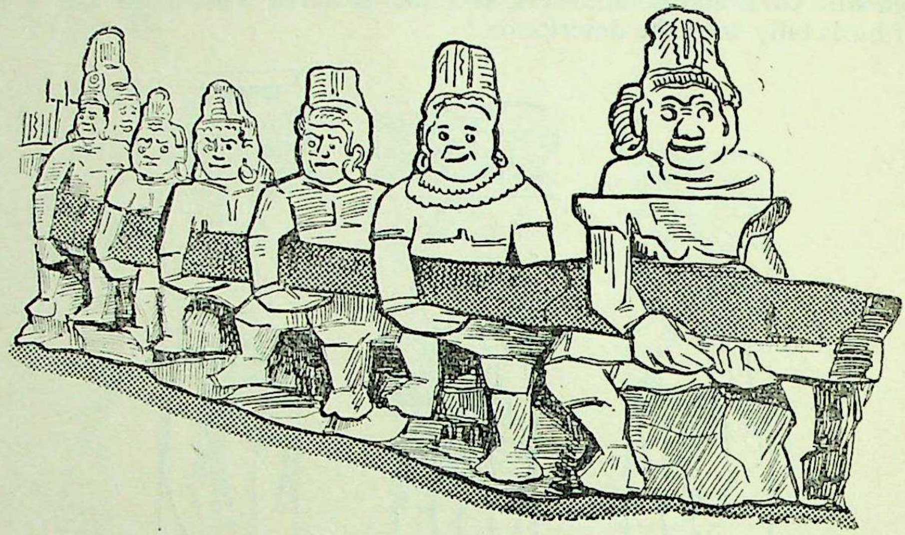

Fig. 119. Asuras holding Vāsuki ; ninth century A.D. (Ankor Thom, Cambodia).

Another feature of early architecture is the presence of *vedikā* near the *jālā-vātāyana*.[1] This "feature," found in the Koṇḍaṇe cave (fig. 118), seems to have been hinted at by Vālmīki (V. 9. 16).[2]

Temples and palaces are often compared for their height to Meru, Mandara and Kailāsa mountains (V. 2. 23). This Valmikian fancy can be seen crystallized in the magnificent temple at Ankor Thom, in distant Cambodia, rearing up its lofty towers and approached by bridges over the moat. Further, there are parapets of Devas and Asuras, fifty-four on each side of a bridge, supporting the many-headed Nāga—a scene reminiscent of the concept of the Mandara mountain used as a churn-stick with Vāsuki as the string at *amṛta-manthana.* This episode is succinctly alluded to by Vālmīki when he describes the huge figure of Rāvaṇa as comparable to the Mandara mountain—with his black waist-string resembling Vāsuki the snake (V. 22. 26). The Cambodian monument seems to glorify in stone this celebrated allegory by presenting a whole balustrade on either side of the approach, representing a series of gods on one side and demons on the other doing the churning (fig. 119 and 120).[3]

In the Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa (43. 44-8), there is an elaborate description of wish-granting trees (*kalpavṛkṣas*) yielding all objects of desire. In ancient *stūpas*, the *kalpavṛkṣa* gives place to the *kalpavallī* (wish-granting creeper), being better suited as an architectural motif. On the railing of the *stūpa*, whether at Bharhut or at Sāñcī, this creeper runs the whole length of the coping or upright in meandering fashion, conforming to Vālmīki's description as it were.[4]

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[1] *Jālā-vātāyana* is a perforated window, while *vedikā* is a rail surrounding a building or coming above a structure as a balustrade and also similarly in the case of a flight of steps. The *vedikā* is composed of plinth, uprights, cross-bars and coping.

[2] C. Sivaramamurti : *op. cit.*, p. 92.

[3] C. Sivaramamurti : *Sanskrit Literature and Art—Mirrors of Indian Culture*, pp. 8-9.

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

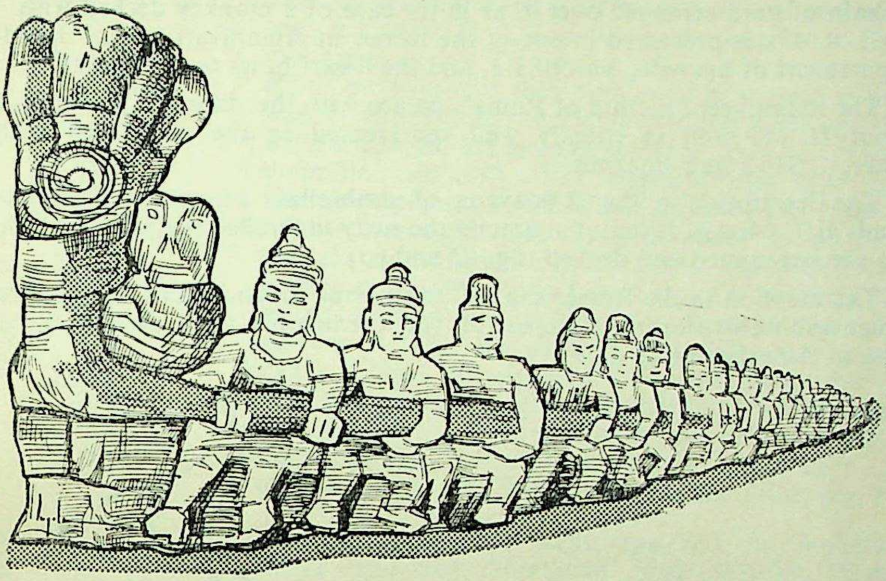

Fig. 120. Devas holding Vāsuki ; ninth century A.D. (Ankor Thom, Cambodia).

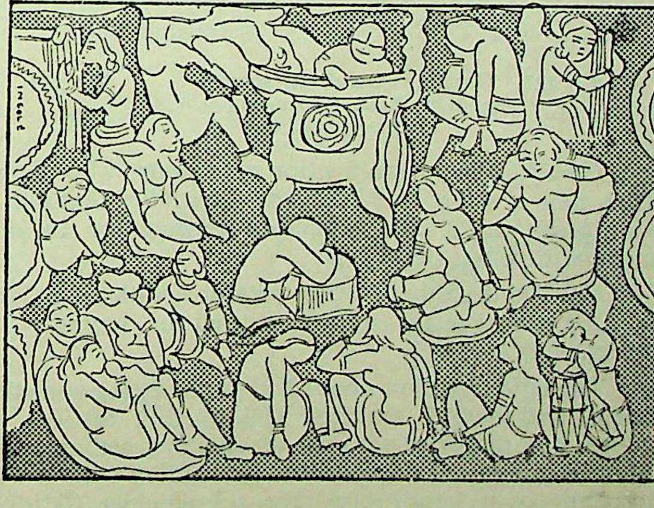

Fig. 121. Ladies with musical instruments asleep around their lord, from Amarāvatī; Sātavāhana, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

The splendid description of Rāvaṇa and his sleeping wives (V. 10. 35-45) has been almost exactly repeated in a suitable situation by Aśvaghoṣa. Vālmīki elaborately describes how the sleeping damsels were hugging a musical instrument each; every attitude conceivable has been recorded by the poet in a vivid picture which has been vivified in carvings of a *caitya*-slab at Amarāvatī depicting Siddhārtha in his palace before renunciation (fig. 121)—the scene chosen by Aśvaghoṣa for echoing Vālmīki. The sculptural presentation of this theme is perfect in all respects, all the different musical instruments shown, and the ladies lying about in postures exactly in the manner of Vālmīki's narration.[1] Similarly, the description in the Uttarakāṇḍa, where Rāma offers the cup of wine to Sītā, has been depicted in stone in a *madhu-pāna* scene at Ajaṇṭā (fig. 23).[2]

A lovely picture of a *kubjā* (hunch-back, fig. 35), as we get in the Rāmāyaṇa with due emphasis on the hunch, for which queen Kaikeyī had prepared an awning and chain of gold arranged over it, as in the case of a monkey decked with straps of gold (II. 9. 47), is presented in one of the scenes at Amarāvatī where Buddha visits the apartment of his wife, Yaśodharā, and the dwarf bows to his master.[1]

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[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

The magnificent picture of Rāma's palace with the different *kakṣyās* described in detail (II. 15. 30-9) is equally well represented in the sculptured mansions at Amarāvatī, Sāñcī and Bharhut.[2]

The description in the Rāmāyaṇa of umbrellas, adorned with festoons and garlands (III. 64. 45), is imitated among the early umbrellas sculptured at Amarāvatī which are begemmed and decked (fig. 62 and 63).[3]

The mention in the Rāmāyaṇa of auspicious bovine horn can be related to the huge and richly decorated horns of the cornucopia type carried by a comely woman at Amarāvatī (fig. 48).[4]

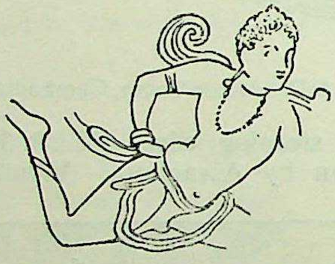

Fig 122. Garuḍa ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

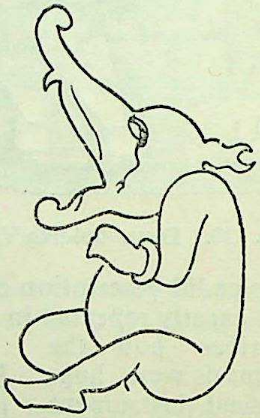

Fig. 123. Merman ; Amarāvatī, second century A.D. (Government Museum, Madras).

Garuḍa, the personification of valour, who comes in anthropomorphic form with a pair of wings to drive away the snakes that had bound Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to stillness (VI. 50. 39), is likewise represented in the Amarāvatī sculptures as a human with wings (fig. 122).[5]

Vālmīki describes strange creatures with animal faces as followers of Rāvaṇa (fig. 123). This seems to have inspired the sculptor to set a crocodile head on a human trunk.[6]

The epic tradition about Kabandha being something huge, headless and devoid of neck, and face in stomach (III. 69. 27), testifies to the ingenuity of a skilful sculptor at Amarāvatī who has made an exceedingly interesting study of the subject and created a visual form of Evil protruding with one eye from his stomach.[7] For sheer fantasy of conception, the *udaremukha* (III. 69. 27) motif has been widely repeated in other places like Ghaṇṭaśālā, Ajaṇṭā, Sāranāth and even in the exquisite panels of the Śiva Temple at Prambanan (fig. 124).[8]

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[1] *Op cit.*, pp. 66-7.

[2] *Op. cit* , pp. 72-3.

[3] C. Sivaramamurti : *Amarāvatī Sculptures*, p. 97.

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

[5] *Op. cit.*, p 75.

[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

[8] C. Sivaramamurti : *Sanskrit Literature and Art—Mirrors of Indian Culture*, p. 83.

It is also likely that some of the descriptions of the Rāmāyaṇa were utilized for representation on coins. One such occurs at II. 2. 22 : When the citizens of Ayodhyā are apprised by Daśaratha of his intention to anoint Rāma as *yuvarāja*, they exclaimed how great their desire was to see the noble and mighty Rāma going on the lofty State Elephant, his temples screened from the sun by an umbrella held aloft. The elephant-rider type coins of Kumāragupta are a splendid example of this lovely theme of an emperor riding the State Elephant in all his glory with a Parasol raised over his head. Plate XV, 16 of the catalogue of coins of the Gupta dynasty (in the *Catalogue of Indian Coins*) is a gold coin of Kumāragupta I (fifth century A.D.). Its obverse shows the king, sword in hand, astride an elephant advancing left, and behind the king is seated an attendant holding an umbrella over him (fig. 125).[1] Even so late as the reign of Akbar in the sixteenth century, we find a silver coin of his showing Rāma and Sītā leaving for the Wilds (fig. 126).

"In India, the Rāmāyaṇa and the *Mahābhārata*, Rāma and Sītā, Hanumān and Rāvaṇa, Viṣṇu and Garuḍa, Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, and the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas are everywhere—in sculptured stones about the temples and on the carved wood-work of houses, on the graven brass and copper of domestic utensils—painted in fresco on walls : Rāma like Viṣṇu dressed in yellow, the colour of joy, Lakṣmaṇa in purple, Bharata in green and Śatrughna in red. The figures carved on

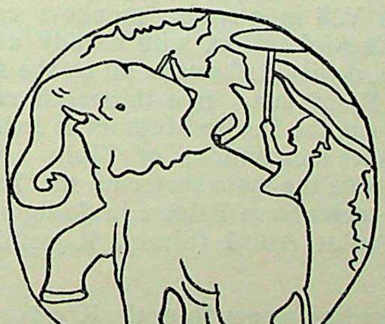

Fig. 125. Gold coin of Kumāragupta I, fifth century A.D. ; obverse, showing the king with goad in right hand, riding elephant advancing (left); behind, the king is seated an attendant holding umbrella over him (Cal. Ind. Coins, Gupta Dyn., pl. xv, 16).

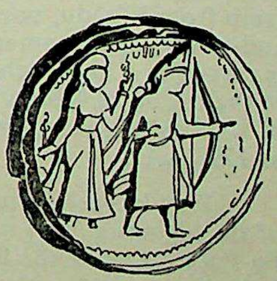

Fig. 126. Rāma and Sītā going to the jungle; sixteenth century A.D., silver coin (Courtesy : Bharat Kala Bhawan, Vārāṇasī).

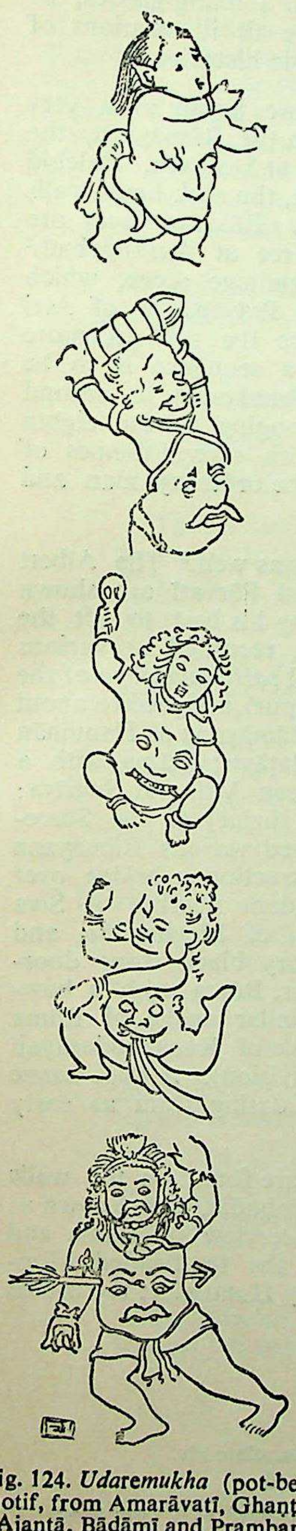

Fig. 124. *Udaremukha* (pot-bellied) motif, from Amarāvatī, Ghaṇṭaśālā, Ajaṇṭā, Bādāmī and Prambaṇan.

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[1] C. Sivaramamurti : *Some Numismatic Parallels of Kālidāsa.* p. xiii and 17.

ivory combs used by women and painted on the back of their looking-glasses, or wrought in their jewellery and bed-coverings and robes – are all illustrations of characters, scenes and incidents from one or other of these heroic histories."[1]

The depiction of the Rāma-story in ancient Indian sculpture began at a very late period. Among the extant sculptures depicting scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa, the most considerable are those in Daśāvatāra (Gupta) Temple at Deogarh, Halebid (Hoysala) and Hazārā Rāma Temples (Vijayanagar). At Ellora, the rock-hewn walls of the Kailāsa are adorned with scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa. Rākṣasa faces are found sculptured in the Durgā Temple, Aihole, and in cave three at Aurangabad.[2] The Bharhut sculptures (*c.* second century B.C.) contain a hermitage scene, which Cunningham supposes to be the hermitage of *ṛṣi* Bharadvāja at Prayāga or of Atri at Citrakūṭa, showing Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā standing before the *ṛṣi*.[3] A more elaborate and dramatic representation of Rāmāyaṇa scenes in a sequence is to be found in four parts of a narrative panel sculpted at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (*c.* second century A.D.).[4] The massive shrine at Paharpur (Bengal), belonging to the eighth century A.D., contains some panels which bear connection with several themes of the Rāmāyaṇa—themes that have the most popular appeal to the ordinary man and woman to this day.[5]

There are many Rāmāyaṇa scenes in Rājasthān sculptures as well.[6] The Albert Museum at Jaipur has a fine stone sculpture wherein Śiva and Pārvatī are shown sitting together on the Kailāsa and down below Rāvaṇa is trying his best to lift the mountain. The discovery of this type of sculpture has been recorded at various places in India and, what is called, Greater India. The domical *sabhā-maṇḍapa* of the Nīlakaṇṭha Mahādeva Temple at Kekīnda (87 miles from Jodhpur), assigned to about tenth century A.D., presents, *inter alia,* such scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa as Hanumān lifting a mountain on both his hands; Rāma standing near Jaṭāyu; Rāma with a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other; the combat between Vālī and Sugrīva; and the golden deer. Similarly, on the outskirts (of the main shrine) of the Someśvara Temple at Kirāḍu (123 miles from Jodhpur) are carved various Rāmāyaṇa scenes such as Sugrīva and Vālī in grapple; monkeys constructing a bridge over the sea; and Sītā in Rāvaṇa's Aśokavāṭikā with a lady attendant nearby. A Śiva shrine, very near this temple, depicts Lakṣmaṇa hit by the *śakti* of Meghanāda, and some other scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa. In a thirteenth century black stone door-jamb from Kirāḍu, now kept in the Sardar Museum at Jodhpur, Rāma with a bow-and-arrow, figures among other incarnations of Viṣṇu. A similar image of Rāma is carved in a high niche outside the main shrine of the Temple of Raṇachoḍarāyajī in the region of Kheḍa (five miles from Balotra in Jodhpur division). A huge image of Hanumān is found installed at Asāvā (Sirohi, Rājasthān) dating from as early as 1298 A.D.

Fine bas-reliefs representing scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa are found on the walls of the highest gallery in the Tower of the Golden Horn at Cambodia, now known as Ba Puon. Among the Rāma-reliefs may be mentioned the interview of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with Sugrīva; the duel between Sugrīva and Vālī; the ten-headed Monster, on a chariot drawn by lions, facing Rāma charioteered by Hanumān; the ordeal of Sītā; and Rāma enthroned.[1] Again, in the Angkor Vat (originally perhaps a Viṣṇu Temple) of Cambodia, there are reliefs representing eleven episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa—*viz.*, the death of Kabandha, the alliance of Rāma with Sugrīva, the duel between Sugrīva and Vālī, Hanumān finding Sītā at Laṅkā, the Laṅkā battle-field, etc., ending with the return of Rāma in an aerial chariot (Puṣpaka). The first six scenes are also to be found in the Rāma reliefs of Prambanan in Central Java, a temple of the ninth century A.D. The Prambanan reliefs are decidedly superior in artistic merit, though they do not follow Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa closely.[2]

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[1] George C. M. Birdwood : *The Industrial Arts of India,* part i, p. 26.

[2] A. Coomaraswamy : *A History of Indian and Indonesian Art,* p. 79.

[3] R. K. Mookerjee : *Ancient Indian Education,* plate xv, p. 344.

[4] Memoir No. 54 of Archaeological Department, Government of India, plate xlv.

[5] R. C. Majumdar : *History of Bengal,* vol. i, p. 526 and plate xlvii, 116.

[6] See R. C. Agrawala : *Rāmāyaṇa Scenes in Rājasthān Sculptures* (*Indian Historical Quarterly,* June, 1954).

The epigraphical literature of India seems to have borrowed some of the utterances, thoughts and phraseology of the Rāmāyaṇa as can be seen from the following parallels :[3]

Inscriptions	Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa
1. *ebhyo brāhmaṇebhyo nānā-gotra-caraṇa-tapaḥ-svādhyāya-niratebhyaḥ/* (The Mattepad plates of Dāmodara-varmā of the 4th century A.D., *Epigraphia Indica*, xvii, p. 329, fig. 1).	1. *tapaḥ-svādhyāya-niratam tapasvī vāgvidām varam/* I. 1. 1.
2. *parjanyena ekārṇavabhūtāyām iva pṛthivyām kṛtāyām/* (Inscription of the Mahākṣatrapa Rudradāman of the 2nd century A.D., *Epigraphia Indica*, viii, p. 42, fig. 2).	2. *ayam hi utsahate kruddhaḥ kartum ekārṇavam jagat/* V. 49. 20.
3. *porajana-nivisesa-sama-sukhadukhasa/* (Nasik cave inscription of Bālāsirī of the 2nd century A.D., *Epigraphia Indica*, viii, p. 60, fig. 3).	3. Cf. *vyasaneṣu manuṣyāṇām bhṛṣam bhavati duḥkhitaḥ/utsaveṣu ca sarveṣu piteva parituṣyati//* II. 2. 40-1.
4. *saṁrañjayām ca prakṛtir babhūva pūrvasmitābhāṣaṇa-māna-dānaiḥ/* (Skandagupta's inscription of 457 A.D. on the rock at Girnar, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, iii, p. 60, fig. 4).	4. *smita-pūrvābhibhāṣī ca dharmam sarvātmanā śritaḥ/* II. 2. 42.
5. *yo lālayāmāsa ca pauravargan putrān suparīkṣya doṣān/* (*op. cit.*).	5. *paurān svajanavad nityam kuśalam paripṛcchati/ putreṣu agniṣu dāreṣu preṣya-śiṣya-gaṇeṣu ca// nikhilena ānupūrvyā ca pitā putrān iva aurasān//* II. 2. 38-9.

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[1] B. R. Chatterjee : *Indian Cultural Influences in Cambodia*, pp. 165-6.

[2] *Op. cit*., pp. 208-9.

[3] C. Sivaramamurti : *op. cit.*, pp. 3- 0.

Inscriptions	Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa
6. *deva-dvija-guru-vṛddhopacayina.../* (Pikirā grant of Pallava Siṁhavarmā, *Epigraphia Indica*, viii, p. 161).	6. *bahuśrutānām vṛddhānām brāhmāṇānām upāsitā/* II. 2. 33.
7. *samudra iva gambhiraḥ kṣamayā pṛthivī-samaḥ/* (Inscription of Mangaleśa on the Mahākūṭa pillar, *Indian Antiquary*, xix, p. 17, fig. 6).	7. *samudra iva gāmbhīrye...kṣamayā pṛthivī-samaḥ/* I. 1. 17-8.
8. *jyeṣṭhaḥ śreṣṭha-guṇa-samudayodita-puru-raṇa-parākramāṅkapriyaḥ/* (*op. cit.*, fig. 17).	8. *jyeṣṭham śreṣṭha-guṇair yuktam priyam daśarathaḥ sutam/* I. 1. 20.
9. *tasya putro mahātehāḥ kandarpa iva mūrtimān/dharmajñaś ca kṛtajñaś ca pārtha-tulya-parākramaḥ//* (Satārā grant of the eastern Cālukyan King Viṣṇuvardhan, *Indian Antiquary*, xix, p. 309, fig. 8).	9. *rūpavān subhagaḥ śrīmān kandarpa iva mūrtimān/* V. 34. 30 ; *dharmajñaś ca kṛtajñaś ca satya-vākyo dṛḍhavrataḥ/* I. 1. 2.
10. *satya-parākramaḥ/* (A *viruda* or title of Pallava Narasiṁhavarmā at Mahābalipuram, given on one of his 7th century inscriptions on an ornamental pavilion of the Dharmarājaratha, *vide*, *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. i, p. 4, fig. 9).	10. *divyair guṇaiḥ śakrasamo rāmaḥ satya-parākramaḥ/* II. 2. 2. *tamevam guṇa-sampannam rāmam satya-parākramam/* I. 1. 19 ; II. 2. 48.
11. *jalanidhir iva vyoma vyomnaḥ samo'bhavad ambudhiḥ/* (Ravikīrti's verse in the Aihole inscription of Pulakeśī, *Epigraphia Indica*, vi, p. 6, fig. 10).	11. *sāgaram cāmbara-prakhyam ambaram sāgaropamam/ rāmarāvaṇayor yuddham rāmarāvaṇayor iva//* VI. 107. 51-2.
12. *kailāsa-śikhara-pratimāni/* (Mandsor inscription of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvarmā, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, iii, p. 81, fig. 73).	12. *kailāsa-śikhara-prakhyam ālikhantam iva ambaram/* V. 2. 23.

Even in Greater India, some of the inscriptions discovered contain utterances reminiscent of Vālmīki's descriptions, which testify to the currency of the epic there in early times.[1]

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[1] See Nilakantha Sastri : *op. cit.*, pp. 117-8.

Though, in the recitations and dramatic representations, it is the story of the suffering of the human Rāma that has such a magnetic attraction for the masses of India ; it is the deified Rāma, the incarnation of god Viṣṇu, who exercises a dominant influence on their religious practices. The plausible theory that the Hindu gods are not mere personifications of the phenomena of nature, nor abstract vegetarian spirits, but are to be regarded in almost every case as having once been men or women—whose exploits, virtues and sufferings deeply impressed their contemporaries :[1] may be applied with justification to the god Rāma, the most towering human figure of his age, hailed by posterity as *maryādā-puruṣottama*. "A dutiful son, a loving brother, a devoted husband, he is undoubtedly a good king, a gentle knight, a noble friend, a generous foe, whose human perfections seem to be so complete that one is not surprised at all when one is told that he was the essence of Godhead incarnate."[2] It is, therefore, quite intelligible to see in the epic itself that when Rāma had slain Rāvaṇa, the terror of the then-known world, Brahmā and other gods offered obeisance to him and declared that he was really Viṣṇu, the glorious lord of the discus (VI. 117). The belief here expressed that Rāma is the seventh incarnation of Viṣṇu has secured to the hero of the Epic the worship of the Hindus down to the present day. Temples are dedicated to Rāma and pilgrimages held at places associated with his stay. South-west of Allahabad lies the hill of Citrakūṭa which has been a pilgrim centre of holiness where Rāma and Sītā lived so happily in the earlier part of their exile. It is significant that the cult of Rāma (and Kṛṣṇa) is probably the only religious tie that binds together the teeming millions of India with their multitudinous sects, beliefs and practices.

More than this, the story of Rāma has inspired our religious reformations and purified the popular faith of modern times. Rāma, the true and dutiful, is accepted as the spirit of God descended on earth—an incarnation of Viṣṇu, the sustenance of the world. The great teacher, Rāmānuja, proclaimed the monotheism of Viṣṇu in Southern India in the twelfth century ; the reformer Rāmānanda proclaimed the same faith in Northern India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries ; and his follower, the homeless Kabīra, conceived the bold idea of uniting Hindus and Mahommedans in the worship of one God. "The God of the Hindus," he taught, "is the God of the Mahommedans, be he invoked as Rāma or Rahīm." Caitanya in Bengal and Nānak in the Punjab preached the same sublime monotheism. The mission of Tulasīdāsa in particular was "simply to set before the people of Northern India in their own vernacular the figure of Rāma as a personification of the underlying essence of the universe, as a revelation beyond the senses and reason, to be received with faith and cherished with love and piety."[3] And down to the present day, popular mind in India, given to the worship of many idols in various temples, nevertheless holds fast to the cardinal ideal of one God and believes the heroes of the ancient epics—Rāma and Kṛṣṇa—to be incarnations of the One.

The Rāmāyaṇa, being a shrine of Hindu ideals of life and superlife, continues even today to be the bedrock on which Indian ethics and ideals are based and practised. It gives the patterns of standards for each person to fashion his conduct in daily life. There can be no better text-book of morals which can be safely placed in the hands of youths to inspire them to higher and nobler ideals of conduct and character.[4] By portraying an ideal king, an ideal husband, an ideal wife, an ideal

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1. W. Ridgeway : *op. cit.*, p. 113.
2. K. T. Shah : *The Splendour that was 'Ind*, p 65.
3. R. W. Frazer : *A Literary History of India*, p. 369.
4. P. P. S. Sastri : *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa*, Introduction, p. viii.

brother and an ideal servant, in the characters of his epic revealing the loftiest conception of moral grandeur, Vālmīki has simply elevated the imagination of the Indians. The moral effect of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa in particular is so powerful that it will for ever remain "a noble and divine example before the man in the street in India, urging great men to keep their promise at any cost, goodness in the sons to obey their father, nobility in the wives cheerfully to share the lot, however miserable, of their husbands, and misguided and obstinate women not to pursue too far their sinister motives lest they earn the title of a veritable Kaikeyī. Without exaggeration and without absurdities, by means of a simple trustful story, the poet so arouses our feelings and rivets the lessons of ordinary life so strongly upon our minds that they sink deep into our hearts and we feel strong and courageous in the performance of our duty under any circumstances."[1] If the example of Rāma, self-abnegating and heroic, possessed of the highest virtues that can adorn humanity, and ever abiding by truth and righteousness through the extremes of misery and misfortune, has been a virtual embodiment of moral perfection—a *preux chevalier sans peur et sans reproche* ; Sītā, the personification of all loveliness and grace, mental and physical, has become to Indian women the grand exemplar of chastity and wifely fidelity, furnishing them with the highest and noblest conception of their duties to their various relations in life. Rāma and Sītā together embody the Indian ideal of a perfect life. They have become the perennial fountains of our joy and sorrow and our only solace during the ups and downs of life.

The Rāmāyaṇa has been thus completely woven into the fabric of Indian life and culture. Along with the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas, it played a unique role in the cultural amalgamation of the diverse races and tribes, clans and religious sects of ancient and medieval India, and in the sublimation of the outlook of all classes of the Indian people. It has set up ideals of manhood and womanhood which have been cherished and emulated by peoples of all classes and denominations and have thus helped to ennoble them and succour them in their trials and tribulations. Such absolute and all-commanding sway and influence of literature is perhaps unknown in the West with the single exception of the Bible.[2] Even Occidental scholars agree that no work of world literature, secular in its origin, has ever exerted so profound an influence on the life and thought of a people as the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa.[3] It contains and shows in a poetical form the luxuriance of "the political, religious and social life of India, past and present, and will probably continue to nourish and reflect it in all the variety and picturesqueness of its traditional composition, action and colouring as long as the Hindus shall endure as a separate and self-contained religious policy. It constitutes the charm that has stayed the course of time in India and will probably continue for ages yet to reflect the morning star of Civilization, fixed as it were in the heaven of Indra, and irremovable."[4] Michelet, the French historian, writing in 1864 with special reference to the Rāmāyaṇa, thus acknowledges in eloquent words the abiding worth and charm of the *ādi-kāvya* : "Whoever has done or willed too much, let him drink from this deep cup a long drought of life and youth. Everything is narrow in the West—Greece is small and I stifle ; Judaea is dry and I pant. Let me look towards lofty Asia and the profound East for a while. There lies my great poem, as vast as the Indian Ocean, blessed, gilded with the sun, the book of divine harmony wherein is no dissonance. A serene peace reigns there and, in the midst of conflict, an infinite sweetness, a boundless fraternity, which spreads over all things as an ocean (without bottom or bound) of love, of piety, of clemency."[1]

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[1] C. V. Vaidya : *The Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 130.

[2] M. N. Dutt : Introduction to his translation of the Rāmāyaṇa.

[3] Macdonell in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. x, p. 574.

[4] George C. M. Birdwood : *op. cit.*, p. 32-3.

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[1] Quoted in Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, p. 111.

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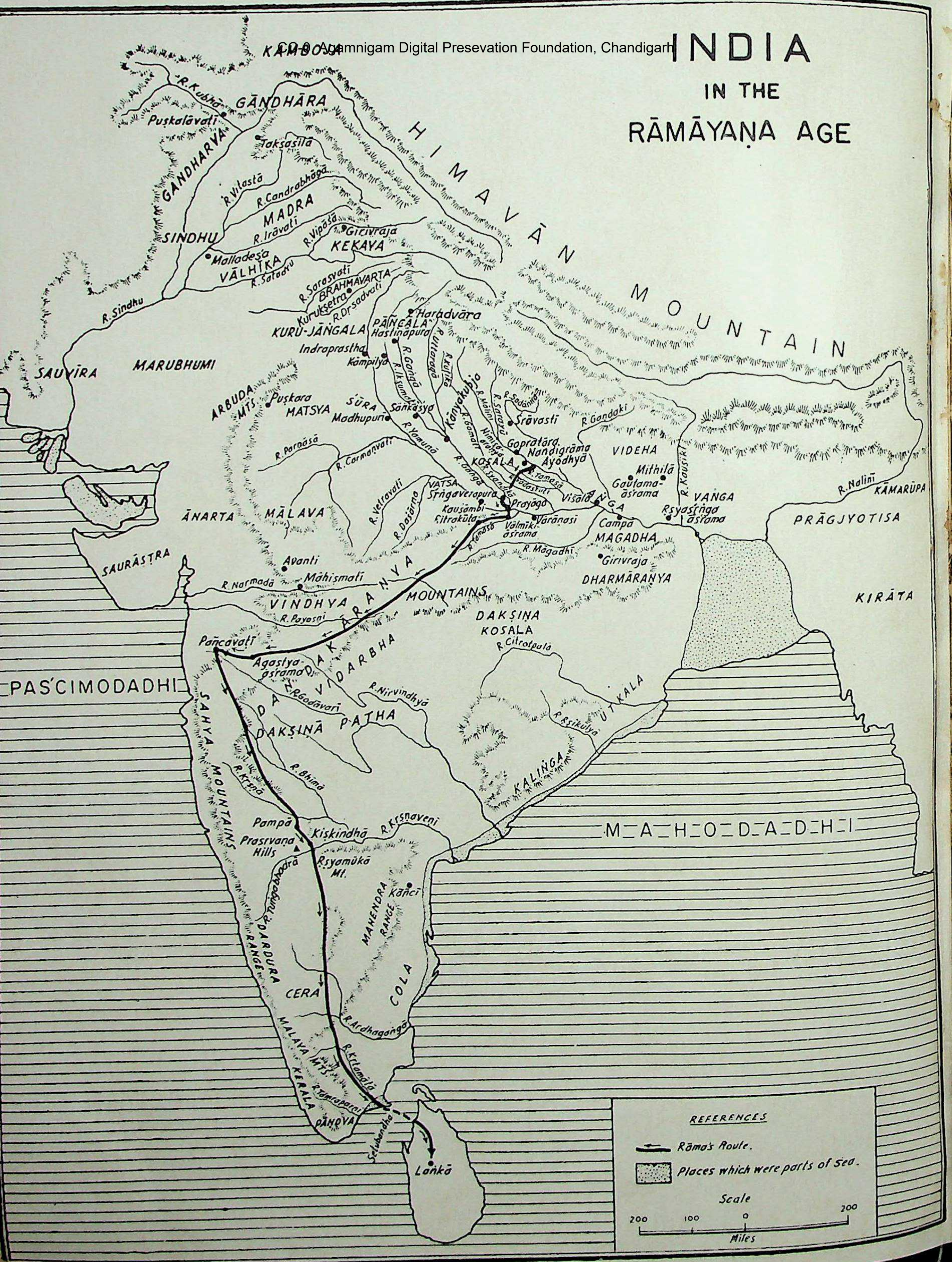
INDIA IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA AGE


KAMBOJA
R. Kubhā
GĀNDHĀRA
Puṣkalāvatī
Takṣaśilā
GANDHARVA
HIMAVĀN MOUNTAIN
R. Vitastā
R. Candrabhāgā
MADRA
R. Irāvatī
R. Vipāśā
Girivraja
KEKAYA
SINDHU
Malladeśa
VĀLHĪKA
R. Śatadru
R. Sarasvatī
BRAHMAVARTA
Kurukṣetra
R. Dṛṣadvatī
R. Sindhu
Haradvāra
PĀÑCĀLA
KURU-JĀṄGALA
Hastināpura
Indraprastha
Kāmpilya
R. Gaṅgā
R. Ikṣumatī
R. Uttaragā
R. Kuṭikā
SAUVĪRA
MARUBHUMI
ARBUDA MTS.
Puṣkara
MATSYA
ŚŪRA
Madhupurī
Sāṅkāsya
Kānyakubja
R. Yamunā
R. Gomatī
R. Mālinī
R. Sarayū
R. Sadānīrā
Śrāvastī
R. Gaṇḍakī
Nimiṣāraṇya
Gopratāra
Nandigrāma
Ayodhyā
KOSALA
R. Tamasā
R. Syandikā
R. Vedaśruti
VIDEHA
Mithilā
Gautama-āśrama
R. Kauśikī
R. Parāśā
R. Carmaṇvatī
R. Gaṅgā
VATSA
Śṛṅgaverapura
Prayāga
Kauśāmbī
Citrakūṭa
Viśālā
AṄGA
VAṄGA
Ṛṣyaśṛṅga āśrama
Campā
Vārāṇasī
Vālmīki-āśrama
R. Nalinī
KĀMARŪPA
PRĀGJYOTIṢA
ĀNARTA
MĀLAVA
R. Vetravatī
R. Daśārṇā
R. Tamasā
MAGADHA
R. Māgadhī
Girivraja
DHARMĀRAṆYA
SAURĀṢṬRA
Avanti
Māhiṣmatī
R. Narmadā
VINDHYA MOUNTAINS
DAṆḌAKĀRAṆYA
R. Payoṣṇī
KIRĀTA
DAKṢIṆA KOSALA
Pañcavaṭī
Agastya-āśrama
VIDARBHA
R. Citrotpalā
PAŚCIMODADHI
SAHYA MOUNTAINS
R. Godāvarī
R. Nirvindhyā
DAKṢIṆĀ PATHA
UTKALA
R. Ṛṣikulyā
R. Kṛṣṇā
R. Bhīmā
KALIṄGA
Pampā
Kiṣkindhā
R. Kṛṣṇaveṇī
MAHODADHI
Prasravaṇa Hills
R. Ṛṣyamūka Mt.
R. Tuṅgabhadrā
Kāñcī
MAHENDRA RANGE
DARDURA RANGE
CERA
COLA
R. Ardhagaṅgā
R. Kṛtamālā
MALAYA MTS.
KERALA
R. Tāmraparṇī
PĀṆḌYA
Setubandha
Laṅkā
REFERENCES
Rāma's Route.
Places which were parts of Sea.
Scale
200
100
0
200
Miles

APPENDIX A

Place Names in the Rāmāyaṇa

Agastya-āśrama—Twenty-four miles to the south-east of Nasik.

Ānarta—North Gujarat.

Aṅga—The country at the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Sarayū. It was the kingdom of Romapāda, and derived its name from the legend that the *aṅga* or body of the love-god Kāma was consumed here by the fury of Śiva's rage.

Aparatāla—The area north of Rampur.

Ardhagaṅgā—The river Kāverī.

Avantī—The ancient capital of Malwa.

Ayodhyā—The ancient capital of Oudh, on the southern bank of the Sarayū.

Bharadvāja-āśrama—In Prayāga or Allahabad; visited by Rāma on his way to Daṇḍakāraṇya.

Bindusar—A sacred pool situated on the Rudra Himālaya, two miles south of Gangotrī, where Bhagīratha is said to have performed austerities to bring down the Gaṅgā from the heavens.

Brahmāvarta—The country between the rivers Sarasvatī and Dṛṣadvatī, where appeared the first Aryan settlements.

Candrabhāgā—The river Chenāb.

Carmaṇvatī—The river Chambal.

Campā—Near the modern town of Bhagalpur, probably the capital of Aṅga.

Cera—The country comprising Mysore, Coimbatore, Salem, South Malabar, Travancore and Cochin.

Citrakūṭa—Kamatānāth-giri in Bundelkhand. It is an isolated hill on a river called Mandākinī or Payasvinī where Rāma dwelt for some time during his exile.

Citrotpalā—The river Mahānadī in Orissa.

Cola—The Coromondal Coast between the rivers Kṛṣṇā and Kāverī.

Dakṣiṇā-patha—The Deccan; the name applied to that portion of the Indian Peninsula which lies to the south of the Narmadā. The name was originally confined to a remote settlement of the Aryans on the Upper Godāvarī.

Daṇḍakāraṇya—Same as Mahārāṣṭra. According to the Rāmāyaṇa, it stretched from Citrakūṭa to the south of the Godāvarī. A part of it was called Janasthāna. According to Pargiter, it comprised all the forests from Bundelkhand to the river Kṛṣṇā.

Dardura—The Nilgiri Hills.

Dharmāraṇya—In Magadha (South Bihar).

Dṛṣadvatī—The river which flowed through Ambala and Sirhind, now lost in the sands of Rajasthan. It has been identified with modern Chitang which flows parallel to the Sarasvatī.

Gāndhāra—The country lying along the Kabul river, comprising the districts of Peshawar and Rawalpindi.

Gandharva-deśa—The region along the Kabul river between the rivers Indus and Kunar.

Gautama-āśrama—Ahalyā-sthāna in the village of Ahiari, pargana Jarail, twenty-four miles to the south-west of Janakpur in Tirhut.

Girivraja—(1) The capital of Kekaya. (2) In Magadha (South Bihar), identified with Rājagṛha of the Buddhists.

Gokarṇa—Gomukhī, two miles beyond Gangotrī. Bhagīratha, an ancestor of Rāma, is said to have performed austerities at Gokarṇa to bring the Gaṅgā to the plains.

Gomatī—The river on which Lucknow stands.

Gopratāra—Guptāra, a place of pilgrimage on the Sarayū at Fyzabad in Oudh, where Rāma is said to have breathed his last.

Hastināpura—The capital of the Kurus, north-east of Delhi, entirely deluviated by the Gaṅgā. It was situated twenty-two miles north-east of Meerut and south-west of Bijnor on the right bank of the Gaṅgā.

Himavān—The Himālayas.

Hiraṇyavāha—The river Sone.

Hlādinī—Described as situated between Kekaya on the west and the river Śatadru (Sutlej) on the east. Bharata crossed this river on his way to Oudh from Kekaya.

Ikṣumatī—The river Kālīnadī (East) which flows through Kumaon, Rohilkhand and the district of Kanauj.

Ilvalapurī—Ellora, seven miles from Daulatabad. It is said to have been the residence of the demon Ilvala whose brother Vātāpi was killed by Agastya.

Indraprastha—Old Delhi.

Irāvatī—The river Rāvī.

Janasthāna—Aurangabad and the country between the Godāvarī and the Kṛṣṇā. Pañcavaṭī or Nasik was included in Janasthānā.

Kālindī—The river Yamunā.

Kaliṅga—A country lying to the south of Orissa and north of Draviḍa (Cola) bordering the sea.

Kāma-āśrama—Karon in the district of Balia. It was situated on the confluence of the Sarayū and the Gaṅgā, but the Sarayū has now receded far to the east of this place.

Kāmarūpa—Assam.

Kamboja—Pamir; north of the Hindukush and Kashmir.

Kāmpilyā—Kampil, twenty-eight miles north east of Fatehgarh in the Farrukhabad district.

Kāñcī—Conjeeveram, the capital of Cola or Draviḍa.

Kānyakubja—Kanauj, the capital of Gādhi Rājā and the birth-place of Viśvāmitra.

Karṇāṭa—Part of South India including Belgaum, Dharwar, Bijapur and Bellary.

Kārupatha—Kalabagh on the west bank of the Indus. Candraketu, Lakṣmaṇa's son, was installed here as king by Rāma.

Kāśī—The name of the country of which Vārāṇasī was the capital.

Kauśāmbī—Thirty miles west of Allahabad, on the southern bank of the Yamunā; present village of Kosam.

Kauśikī—The river Kosī, a tributary of the Gaṅgā.

Kekaya—A country between the rivers Bias and Sutlej. It was the kingdom of the father of Kaikeyī, one of the queens of Daśaratha.

Kerala—The Malabar Coast.

Kirāta—The eastern frontier of India.

Kosala (North)—Oudh.

Kosala (South)—Chhattisgarh.

Kṛṣṇaveṇī—The united stream of the Kṛṣṇā and Veṇā rivers.

Kṛtamālā—The river Vaiga.

Kuru-Jāngala—To the west and north of Pañcāla, identifiable with Thaneswar.

Kutikā or Kūṭikoṣṭikā—A western tributary of the Rāmagaṅgā.

Laṅkā—Traditionally modern Ceylon, but also regarded variously as east Madhya Pradesh, Madagascar, Australia and the Maladive islands in the Arabian Sea.

Lavapura—Lahore, founded by Lava, Rāma's son.

Lohitya—The river Brahmaputrā.

Madhumanta—Same as Daṇḍakāraṇya.

Madhupurī—Mathurā, founded by Śatrughna, the youngest brother of Rāma, after killing Lavaṇa, son of Madhu.

Madhyadeśa—The country bounded by the river Sarasvatī in Kurukṣetra, Allahabad, the Himālayas and the Vindhya range.

Madra—The region in the Punjab between the rivers Rāvī and Chenāb.

Magadha—South Bihar. Its western boundary was the river Sone.

Māgadhī—The river Sone.

Mahendra—The Eastern Ghats.

Māhiṣmatī—Maheśvara, on the right bank of the Narmadā, forty miles to the south of Indore.

Mahodadhi—The Bay of Bengal.

Mahodaya—Kanauj.

Malaya-giri—The southern parts of the Western Ghats.

Mālinī—Chuka, the western tributary of the Sarayū.

Malladeśa—The district of Multan. Candraketu, Lakṣmaṇa's son, was made the king of Malladeśa by his uncle, Rāma.

Mālyavān—The Anagundi Hill on the bank of the Tungabhadrā. According to Pargiter, Mālyavān and Prasravaṇa are the names of the same mountain or chain of hills, but he thinks that Prasravaṇa is the name of the chain and Mālyavān is the peak.

Mandākinī—The river Citrakūṭā or Payasvinī which issues out of the Ṛṣyavān mountain, flows by the side of Citrakūṭa and joins the Yamunā in the north.

Matsya—Alwar, Bharatpur.

Mithilā—Janakpur, Tirhut.

Naimiṣāraṇya—Nimsar, twenty miles from Sītāpur and forty-five miles to the north-west of Lucknow, on the left bank of the Gomatī.

Nalinī—The river Padmā, same as Brahmaputrā, the Lohityā of the Purāṇas.

Nandigrāma—Nundgaon in Oudh, eight or nine miles to the south of Fyzabad. Bharata is said to have resided at this place during the exile of his brother Rāma.

Pampā—The name of a lake and a river which rising from Ṛṣyamuka flows into it, to the north of the town of Hampi.

Pañcāla—Rohilkhand extending from the Gaṅgā to the Himālayas.

Pañcāpsara-tīrtha—In the district of Udaypur (Chota Nagpur).

Pañcavaṭī—Nasik.

Pāṇḍya—Tinnevelly and Madura districts.

Parṇāṣā—The river Banas.

Pāvanī—The river Ghaggar in Kurukṣetra. It is said to be one of the eastern streams of the Gaṅgā.

Prāgjyotiṣapura—Gauhati.

Pralamba—Madawar or Mundore, eight miles north of Bijnor in western Rohilkhand.

Prasravaṇa—A range of hills on the Tungabhadrā.

Prayāga—Allahabad.

Puṣkalāvatī—The old capital of Gāndhāra, founded by Bharata ; modern Charsaddah, eighteen miles north of Peshawar.

Rājagṛha—In Magadha (South Bihar) ; later the ancient capital of Magadha.

Rāmagiri—Rāmṭek, twenty-four miles to the north of Nagpur, where Rāma is said to have killed Śambūka.

Rasātala—Western Tartary, including Turkestan and the northern side of the Caspian Sea.

Ratnākara or Paścimodadhi—Arabian Sea.

Ṛṣyamūka—A mountain situated eight miles from Anagundi on the bank of the Tungabhadrā. The river Pampā rises in this mountain and falls into the Tungabhadrā after flowing westward. It was at this mountain that Rāma met

Hanumān and Sugrīva for the first time. Mataṅga-vana, where the female ascetic Śabarī resided, was near this mountain on the western side of the river Pampā.

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga-āśrama—Ṛṣi-kuṇḍa, twenty-eight miles to the west of Bhagalpur.

Sadānīrā—The river Rāptī, a tributary of the Sarayū.

Sahya—Sahyādri, the Western Ghats.

Śālmalī—A tributary of the Chenāb.

Sāṅkāśyā—Sankisā, on the north bank of the river Ikṣumatī (Kālīnadī), the capital of King Kuśadhvaja, Sītā's uncle.

Sarasvatī—The river Ghaggar.

Sarayū—The river Ghagra.

Śatadru—The river Sutlej.

Saurāṣṭra—Kathiawar.

Sauvīra—North Sind ; according to N. C. Das, the large territory to the south-west of Rajasthan, overlooking the gulf of Cambay and Kutch.

Siddhāśrama—The western side of Buxar, near the river Thora, in the district of Shahabad.

Sindhu—The river Indus; the country of the upper Indus,

Śrāvastī—Sahet-Mahet on the river Rāptī.

Śṛṅgaverapura—Singraur, eighteen miles north-east of Prayāga, on the Gaṅgā.

Sutīkṣṇa-āśrama—Near the source of the river Mandākinī.

Sumāgadhī—The river Hiraṇyāvaha or Sone.

Sūra—The country about Mathurā.

Suvarṇa-dvīpa—Java.

Syandikā—The river Sai, flowing on the southern boundary of Kosala, between the Gaṅgā and the Gomatī.

Takṣaśilā—Taxila; founded by Bharata in the name of his son, Takṣa, who was placed here as king.

Tamasā—(1) The river Tons, the first river Rāma crossed after leaving Ayodhyā ; it flows through Azamgarh and joins the Gaṅgā in Ballia district; (2) a river in Bundelkhand.

Tāmraparṇī—The river Tāmbaravārī in Tinnevelly.

Trikūṭa—A mountain in Ceylon.

Uśīnara—South Afghanistan.

Utkala—Orissa.

Uttara-Kuru—Tibet and East Turkestan.

Uttaraga—The river Rāmagaṅgā.

Vālhīka—Balkh.

Vālmīki-āśrama—On the Tamasā (Tons), south of the Gaṅgā, twenty miles from Prayāga. Rāma halted here on his way to Citrakūṭa. However according to the Uttarakāṇḍa, it is Bithur, fourteen miles from Kanpur.

Vanāyu—Ancient Arabia.

Vaṅga—Bengal.

Vārāṇasī—The capital of the kingdom of Kāśī.

Vatsa—A country to the west of Allahabad, with Kauśāmbi as its capital. At the time of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Gaṅga was its northern boundary.

Vedaśruti—The river Baita in Oudh, flowing between the rivers Tamasā and the Gomatī.

Vetravatī—The river Betwa.

Vidarbha—Berar.

Videha—Tirhut, the kingdom of Janaka.

Vidiśā—Bhilsa in Malwa on the river Vetravatī or Betwa. According to the Uttarakāṇḍa, Rāma, partitioning his kingdom, gave Vidiśā to Śatrughna's son, Śatrughātī. It is called Vaidiśadeśa in the Rāmāyaṇa.

Vipāśā —The river Beas.

Viśālā—Besad in Muzaffarpur (Tirhut), eighteen miles north of Hajipur, on the left bank of the Gandak. The Rāmāyaṇa places Viśālā on the northern bank of the Gaṅgā. It is identical with the Vaiśālī of the Buddhistic age.

Viśvāmitra-āśrama—On the river Kauśikī (Kosi), somewhere near modern Buxar.

APPENDIX B

Thanks are due to :

Figures 1, 15, 66, 75, Government Museum, Madras ;

Figures 6, 9-13, 16-18, 20, 33, 34, 42, 49, 50, 52-54, 57, 58, 80, 81, 83, 89, 90, 97, 98, 104, 106, 107, Department of Archaeology, Government of India ;

Figures 3-5, 7, 56, 93, 105, 109, Press Information Bureau, Government of India ;

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Figure 24, by B. N. Jijja ;

Figures 25, 41, by Nandalal Bose ;

Figure 39, by Jamini Roy ;

Figure 40, by Ajit Kumar Gupta ;

Figure 43, by Krishna Devsarey ;

Figures 36, 37, 44-46, 48, 59, 62, 63, 65, 69-72, 76, 77, 79, 84, 86-88, 91, 92, 94-96, 99, 100, 111, 112, 121, 122, 123, by C. Sivaramamurti on *Amarāvatī Sculptures in the Madras Museum* (Government Museum, Madras) ;

Figure 78, by V. S. Agrawala on *Harṣacarita—Eka Sānskṛtika Adhyayana* ;

Figures 93, 126 (Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi) ;

Figures 101-103, by R. K. Mookerjee on *Ancient Indian Education* (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London) ;

Figures 55, 110, 113, 116-118, by C. Sivaramamurti on *Some Archaeology Places of the Rāmāyaṇa* (*Journal of Oriental Research*, Madras, xiii, 2) ;

Figure 124, by C. Sivaramamurti on *Some Numismatic Parallels of Kālidāsa* (Shakti Karyalaya, Madras) ;

Figures 23, 35, 60, 74, 75, 85, 114, 115, 119, 120, by C. Sivaramamurti on *Sanskrit Literature and Art—Mirrors of Indian Culture*, Delhi ;

Figures 2, 19, 26, 38, 51, National Museum, Government of India ;

Figure 61, Indian Museum, Calcutta.

APPENDIX C

The Rāmāyaṇa—A Parable of Puruṣa and Prakṛti

It is held by some scholars that the story of the Rāmāyaṇa is an allegory conveying in popular form the basic abstruse ideas like Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita propounded in the Hindu philosophy and chiefly represented by the Sāṁkhya system.

The allegory is explained thus :

Rāma is Puruṣa; Sītā is Prakṛti—both being manifest aspects of the One Reality. This division of One into two took place first in the spiritual plane prior to manifestation in matter.

When manifest on the material plane Puruṣa (Rāma) gets enmeshed in Prakṛti (Sītā). The two going into exile is the allegorical way of expressing the idea of manifestation on the material plane—or the Primal Principle's descent into matter. At this stage Puruṣa forgets his true Self and being lost to Prakṛti (his human ego or self, represented in Sītā).

Prakṛti, overcome by inquisitiveness, like Eve in the Garden of Eden, desires to possess this beautiful deer who was but a deceptive disguise (māyā) assumed by Mārīca, the illusory Satan.

Puruṣa (Rāma), now at one with Prakṛti (Sītā), is easily deluded into doing her behest. Sītā in this context is the human soul or the line dividing the Composite Being including both Matter and Spirit. Sharing two natures, naturally, the human soul is taken in, as was Eve, by appearances and in the process, soul (Sītā) loses contact with her reality or Spirit or Puruṣa. Also, Puruṣa (Rāma) Himself, like Adam, is in no better state.

But this delusion gives a happy turn to the drama of the Divine Spirit and the human soul. He (the Puruṣa, Rāma) now goes in quest of the lost human soul, now is in complete grip of the world of illusion (symbolized in Rāvaṇa's charming Laṅkā).

(This part of the allegory recalls the parable of the Prodigal Son taught by Jesus, in which the son—the lost human soul—voluntarily goes back to his father. Six hundred years earlier Gautama Buddha also taught the story of the Prodigal Son. In the Buddha version, however, it is the father who goes out in quest of the son and bring him back home. Rāma in going out to rescue Sītā follows the Buddha's version of the lost human soul.)

Eventually Puruṣa (or the Lord) rescues Prakṛti (or the human soul, which in reality is one with Puruṣa). Even after the rescue, Rāma (Puruṣa) refuses to accept the rescued soul, she being besmirched with taints of delusion.

Fire burns up the taints—yet not completely, for she still yearns for Puruṣa, and Puruṣa Himself, be it remembered, is not the Ultimate Reality. It is only a partial manifestation of the ONE.

The first forsaking of Sītā is the last test for both Puruṣa (Rāma) as well as Prakṛti (the human soul). In this test fire purification is inadequate. So Sītā gives up her very being, gives up even her yearning for Puruṣa. She (the human soul) thus reduces herself to Nothing (Śūnya or Nirvāṇa). This is the final redemption of the human soul—attainment of absolute freedom from Māyā, total abnegation or self-dissolution.

Puruṣa having achieved the redemption of the human soul, consequently, finds no purpose in manifest existence. Yet Rāma grieves for the departed Sītā; that is, Puruṣa is still in partial grip of Māyā (his own creation, though it is). Rāma drowns himself—he too goes into dissolution. Both Puruṣa and Prakṛti—subsuming the whole Universe in the allegory—go into Mahāpralaya, the Great Deluge. Both resume or are absorbed back into their original state—the One Eternal Reality, Nirvāṇa—which, being inconceivable, is spoken of variously as Void, 'Sunniya,' Non-being, Immeasurable, Infinite, Unnameable, Unknowable.

APPENDIX D

Comparison of Aryan, Rākṣasa and Vānara Cultures

It is evident from the foregoing that the poet of the Rāmāyaṇa was acquainted only with one type of civilization. The Kings of Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā are all descended from the gods of the Aryan pantheon and profess Vedic religion. The Vedas are studied with reverence at the three capitals and their injunctions strictly followed by the three races of men, monkeys and monsters in the installation and obsequies of their kings. Brāhmaṇas are indispensable even at Laṅkā. The poet does not hesitate to apply the Aryan standard of morality to a people whom he holds up to ridicule as veritable monkeys. In material prosperity there is not much to choose between the three cities : Kiṣkindhā not only vies with Ayodhyā in wealth and physical comforts, but also with Laṅkā protected by that prince of iniquities, Rāvaṇa, and, on occasions, surpasses the other two in beauty and splendour.

However, artistic strokes are met with here and there intended to differentiate the three types of civilization from one another. The Vānaras and, still more, the Rākṣasas are addicted to heavy drinking, but intoxicating liquors are not banned in the kingdom of Kosala. And the fatricidal feud of Vālī and Sugrīva, as well as their sensuality, and Rāvaṇa's violence and abandonment to the lust of the flesh—truly signifies a lower grade of civilization. But the history of the world provides abundant proofs that intellectual progress does not always run parallel to man's moral development.

The structure of society and the form of government are the same everywhere throughout the epic. Monarchy is recognized by all. Daśaratha is no less polygamous than Rāvaṇa; and Sugrīva's espousal of Tārā after the death of his elder brother Vālī finds an echo in the bitter reproaches of Sītā when at the crisis of her fate she charges Lakṣmaṇa with harbouring the wicked design of seizing upon her should Rāma die. One major point of resemblance in social custom is the seclusion of women in the three kingdoms. They ordinarily live in *antaḥpuras* or inner apartments, but, curiously, follow the funeral procession to the cremation ground on the death of the king. In all the three communities, Aryan and non-Aryan, the position of women is the same.

Another point worth noting is the council of elders which is consulted on all important matters, and during crisis, by the rulers of Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā. The administrative apparatus appears to be the same.

Yet there is a broad line of demarcation in the depiction of the three races; this is something we will do well to note. In the Aryan society the supremacy of the Brāhmaṇas is unassailably established ; it therefore centres round the hermitage. In the epic, there are Brāhmaṇas or priests among the non-Aryans too, but we do not hear of hermitages at Kiṣkindhā or Laṅkā.

The general monotony of the civilizations of Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā is, however, relieved by some features of the funeral rites performed at the death of Rāvaṇa which are conspicuously absent from those performed at the other two capitals The orientation of the 'altar,' the placing of the various articles on different parts of the corpse, at its feet and around it, the sacrifice of a clean beast and the death-mask—these are items peculiar to the obsequies of the King of Laṅkā. They perhaps point to his non-Aryan origins or associations, but the clue to their significance is not to be found in the Rāmāyaṇa.[1]

APPENDIX E

Some parts of this work were also published in the following journals :

The *Poona Orientalist*, Poona ;
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The *Bharat Jyoti*, Bombay ;
The *Hindustan Times Weekly*, New Delhi ;
Triveni Quarterly, Masulipatam ;
The *Women's Welfare Journal*, Madras ;
Organiser, Delhi ;

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[1] See Rajanikanta Guha : *The Three Type of Civilization in the Rāmāyaṇa* (The *Modern Review*, lxv, pp. 78-9).

The *Journal of Āyurveda*, New Delhi;
The *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Baroda ;
The *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay:
Amrita Bazar Patrika, Allahabad ;
Caravan, New Delhi ;
Fauji Akhbar, New Delhi;
American Reporter, New Delhi;
Social Welfare, New Delhi;
The *Modern Review*, Calcutta; etc., etc.

GLOSSARY

ācārya—preceptor.

ādharma—unrighteousness; irreligion.

ādi-kavi—the first poet, Vālmīki.

āgni-śālā
āgni-śaraṇa—a fire-sanctuary ; a house or place for keeping the sacred fire.

agnihotra—maintenance of sacred fire.

āgrāyaṇa—the time of the sacrifice.

aguru—a kind of sandal wood.

agnyāgāra—place of sacred fire.

āhāra—taking food.

āhitāgni—a Brāhmaṇa who keeps sacred fire.

āhnika—daily duties.

akṣata—*yava* or rice grain.

āmalaka—a kind of tree, or its fruit.

amātya—a minister.

ambara—a garment.

añjali—the hollow of hands joined together ; (hence) a mode of salutation, and, too, supplication.

aneka—more than one.

aṅgarāga—ointment.

antaḥpura—the female apartment, especially of a king.

anudātta—grave (accent).

anuloma—in natural direction.

anuṣṭubh—a metre.

ānvīkṣikī—logic, metaphysics.

aparā—a king's concubine.

ārca—hymnal (pertaining to the *Ṛgveda*).

arghya—a respectful offering to a god or a venerable person.

arṣa—one of the eight forms of marriage.

artha—money.

arthaśāstra—economics.

āsana—sitting down, a seat.

āśrama—a hermitage.

aṣṭa—eight.

astra—a missile.

āsura—one of the eight forms of marriage.

atharvan—a priest who has to worship fire and Soma.

atharvaśira—name of an Upaniṣad dealing with Brahmavidyā.

atibalā—name of a powerful charm or lore taught by Viśvāmitra to Rāma.

atithi-satkāra—honouring guests.

ātmavān—self-possessed, composed.

ātma-samādhi—self-contented.

aṭṭa—a palatial building.

avaguṇṭhana—a veil.

avatāra—an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

āvika—wool, etc., of a sheep.

āyurveda—the science of medicine.

balā—name of a powerful lore or incantation (taught by Viśvāmitra to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa).

bali-ṣaḍ-bhaga—1/6 of the income or produce as tax.

bauddhāyatanas—Buddhist caves, *i. e.*, *vihāras*.

bhagavān—divine, the Lord

bhāgavata—devotee of Viṣṇu as the Lord supreme.

bhakti—devotion.

bhāṇa—a kind of dramatic composition.

bheda—causing disaffection among the troops of the enemy.

bherī—a kettle-drum.

bhikṣuṇī—a Buddhist nun.

bhiksu
bhikṣuka }—a beggar; a Buddhist monk

bhojana—food.

bhūdāna—gift of land.

bhūmi—a storey; land.

bhūta—Śiva; a living being; a ghost.

bimba—a kind of fruit.

brāhma—a form of marriage; relating to Brāhmaṇa ; holy.

brāhma-ratha—special carriages for honouring Brāhmaṇas.

brāhmaṇa—a particular portion of the Veda.

brahmacarya—life of celibacy.

brahmarṣi—a Brahmanical sage.

brahmāstra—a kind of missile.

brahmavādin(ī)—an expounder of the Vedas.

caitya—a tomb-stone.

campū—prose-poetry.

candana—sandal.

cārvāka—name of an old atheistic philosopher.

ceṭī—a female slave.

chanda—prosody.

cīra—a rag, a bark.

cora—a thief ; a country of the Colas.

crore—ten million.

dakṣiṇā—a present or gift to Brāhmaṇas.

dāna—a gift, charity.

daṇḍanīti—polity, ethics.

daṇḍa—the sceptre of a king.

darbha—a kind of sacred grass.

darśana—looking ; sight ; glimpse.

dātra—an instrument for cutting (a sort of sickle or knife).

dhanuḥ—a bow.

dhanurveda—a *upaveda* treating of archery.

dharma—duty ; morality.

dharma-jyeṣṭha—eminent in *dharma* or duty.

dharmapatnī—a lawful wife.

dhārmika—righteous , virtuous.

dhātrī—a foster-mother, a nurse.

dhūpa—incense.

dvandva-yuddha—a duel.

dvija
dvijāti }—a man of any of the first three castes of the Hindus (twice born).

durga—a citadel ; difficulty.

dyūta—gambling.

ekānta—solitude.

ekapatnīvrata—a vow of devotion to one's own wife ; vow not to re-marry.

gaja-śikṣā—the science of 'mastering elephants.'

gaṇa—a flock, a collection.

gandha—pounded sandalwood ; flavour ; aroma ; scent.

gāndharva—one of the eight forms of marriage (a love marriage).

gaṇikā—a harlot, courtezan.

garbha-skanna—secundines or foetal membranes collectively.

gāthā—a parable; a *śloka*; a Prakrit metre.

gāyatrī—name of a sacred verse repeated by every Brāhmaṇa in his morning and evenieg prayer; a metre.

gīta—singing, a song.

go-dāna—gift of a cow.

go-ratha—an ox-chariot.

gotra—a name; lineage.

graiveyaka— a necklace.

grāma-devatā—the tutelary deity of a village.

gṛdhra—a vulture.

gṛha-devatā—the deity presiding over a planet.

gṛhastha—an householder.

guru—a teacher.

guru-kārya—service of a teacher; a teacher's obligations.

guru-kula—the residence of a *guru*; a university in ancient times.

hari—a Vānara; a monkey.

harmya—a palace.

hemanta—the cold season.

hiṁsā—violence.

homa—a sacrifice.

iṣūpalayantra—a kind of weapon like an arrow; a sling.

jananī--mother.

janapada—a country ; *jānapada*—a citizen.

japa—a prayer said repeatedly.

jātakarma—a ceremony performed at the birth of a child.

jitendriya—he who has conquered his passions or subdued his senses.

jīvanmukti—final liberation (from life cycle) in the present state of life.

jṛmbha(*ka*)—a dazzling, swallowing kind of missile.

kakṣya—the girth of an elephant or horse; a wall, an enclosure.

kāla—time; god of death; destiny.

kalpa—one of the six Vedāṅgas (treatise of *yajña*, a sacrifice).

kāma—wish, affection, lust; the god of love.

kāṇḍa—chapter of a book.

kanyā-dāna—giving away of a girl in marriage.

kanyā-dhana—dowry.

kapi—a monkey; a Vānara.

karma—action; moral duty; fate; 'As ye sow so shall ye reap' or the *raison d'etre* of transmigration.

kārya—work, conduct, duty.

kāśa—a species of grass.

kathā—a tale; conversation; prose composition, an imaginary story.

kathana—narration, relation, description.

kaumārī—the wife of 'one who has not married another wife.'

kauśeya—silk, silken garment.

kāvya—a poem.

kesara—filaments or stamens of a flower.

keyūra—an armlet.

kiṁśuka—a kind of tree.

kośa—a treasure; royal coffer.

krodha—anger.

krauñca—a curlew.

kṣapaṇaka—a Bauddha mendicant. Cf. Bhikṣu(ka).

krośa—a distance equal to 1/4th of a *yojana* (or 2½ miles).

kṛṣṇājina—the skin of the black antelope.

kulaghnī
kula-pāṁsanī—a woman as a curse ruining or disgracing a family.

kulapati—a sage who teaches 10,000 pupils with free board and lodging; Vice-chancellor (now Chancellor).

kuśa—a kind of grass,

kṣauma—linen; silken garment or cloth.

liṅga—a sign; gender; the male organ; the Symbol worshipped as Śiva.

lokāyatika—an atheist, a materialist.

madhu-pāna—drinking of wine.

madhya—middle; neutral.

Mahābhārata—name of the celebrated epic which describes the rivalries and contests of Dhṛtarāśtra and Pāṇḍu.

mahākāvya—an epic poem.

mahāmātra—a minister of a state.

mahāpurī—a great city.

mahārāja—a great king.

maharṣi—a great sage or saint.

mahiṣī—Chief Queen, or a queen-in-general.

maireya—a kind of intoxicating drink.

mālā—a garland.

mālā hiraṇmayī—a kind of golden necklace.

māṁsāśinaḥ—eaters of flesh.

maṇḍapa—an open hall, a stage.

mantra—a Vedic hymn or sacred prayer ; an incantation.

manas—mind.

mandra—slow, tardy, dull.

mānuṣī—a woman.

mārga—a way, a method, an inquiry.

mārjana—clean(s)ing

maryādā-puruṣottama—the best among men devoted to duty ; an expression for Rāma.

māyā—deceit, illusion.

mokṣa—emancipation.

mṛdanga—a kind of drum.

muhūrta—a moment ; a period of 48 minutes.

mukhavāsa—a perfume used to scent breath.

muktā—a pearl.

muni—a sage.

nāgapāśa—a war noose (or trick or missile).

naigama—'corporation;' relating to or occurring in the Veda or holy writings ; a Vedic quotation.

nara—man ; devotee of the Lord.

Nikumbhilā—a cave or grove at the western gate of Laṅkā.

nirvāṇa—eternal bliss.

nirvāpa—an offering at the *śrāddha*.

niṣkraya—exchange, barter.

niveśana—camp ; colony.

niyatātmā—one who has curbed his self ; self-controlled.

nyagrodha—the Indian fig-tree.

padma—a lotus ; a 'White Hall' type of building.

padya—the foot ; the path ('to be gone or traversed').

paiśāca—one of the eight forms of marriage.

pālākalī—a 'wife' of Daśaratha (not among his queens).

pānabhūmi—a drinking place.

paṇḍāl—a sort of tent (*shamiana*).

parṇaśālā—a hut made of leaves.

parigha—an iron (or wooden) beam or latch used for locking or shutting off a gate.

parivrājaka—an ascetic who has renounced the world.

parivṛtta—revolution ; a rebel.

parva—a festival, holiday, a joyous occasion.

pativratā—a devoted and virtuous wife.

pātivratya—fidelity to a husband ; chastity.

paura—a citizen.

pāyasa—rice boiled in milk.

phala-śruti—result.

piṇḍa—a ball of rice or other grain, especially offered to the Manes.

pitā—a father.

pitṛ—fore-fathers, ancestors, fathers.

pitṛdeva—referring to one's ancestors as the Manes.

pitṛmedha—a sacrifice offered to the Manes ; obsequial offering.

plavaṅgama—a monkey ; a Vānara.

prājāpatya—one of the eight forms of marriage.

prākāra—wall ; a city's defence-wall or embankment.

prākrit—a vernacular dialect.

prāṇāyāma—breath-control ; breathing exercise,

prapā—a well.

prāsāda—a palace.

pratiloma—inverted ; contrary to caste ; low, perverse ; 'dissanguinary' marriage.

pravara—a race. Cf. *gotra*.

paura—a citizen. Cf. *jānapada*.

prāyopaveśana—a kind of fast undertaken to end one's life.

preta—departed spirit (the spirit before obsequial rites are performed).

purāṇa—aged, old, ancient ; the whole body of Hindu mythology.

purohita—a family priest.

puruṣārtha—pertaining to life in general ; *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* especially (excluding *mokṣa*, the fourth).

Puṣyā—the asterism called *Puṣya*.

putra—a son.

rāga—a musical mode.

raginī—modification of a musical mode.

rājakartāraḥ—parliament or colleges or people 'electing their king' and conferring powers on him.

rājanīti—politics.

rājarṣi—a royal sage ; Chancellor of an ancient university.

rajas—the second of three *guṇas*,

rājaśāstra—politics ; *rājanīti*.

rajya-śulka—$\frac{1}{6}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the produce or income going to the royal treasury.

rākṣasa—one of the eight forms of marriage.

Rāma līlā—name of a dramatic performance, on the story of Rāma.

raṅga—a theatre.

rasa—true poetic bliss or emotion ; a juice; water.

Ṛgveda—the first of the four Vedas.

ṛṣi—an inspired poet or sage.

ṛtvik—a priest who officiates at a sacrifice.

sabhā—an assembly.

sadyo-vadhū—those who are married at puberty.

sahacāriṇī
saha-dharma-cāriṇī—a wife ; joint performer of religious rites ; a wife 'legally married.'

sahasra—a thousand.

śākhāmṛga—a monkey ; a Vānara,

śakti—a missile,

salila—water.

sāma—conciliation; a metrical hymn of the *Sāmaveda.*

samādhi—deep meditation.

Sāmaveda—the third of the four Vedas; a metrical hymn of the *Sāmaveda.*

śamī—name of a tree.

saṁnyāsa—abandoning worldly attachment.

saṁskāra—a ceremony ; education.

samupasthita-yauvana—adolescent.

sandhyā—meditation.

saṅgha—a group ; a corporation or guild.

saṅgīta—a chorus ; singing to the accompaniment of music and dancing.

śaṅku—a collection, multitude.

sapiṇḍa—a kin, connected by blood.

sapta—seven.

sārasa—the Indian crane.

śara—a reed.

sārikā—a kind of bird.

sarva-kāma-dughā—a mythological cow 'that granted all wishes.'

śāstra—a sacred precept or rule ; scripture, scriptural injunctions.

śāstrārtha—a scriptural statement or debate.

śata—a hundred ; a large number. Cf. *sahasra.*

śataghnī—a kind of missile.

satī—a virtuous wife.

sattva—virtue, truth ; manliness.

sāttvika—virtuous, good ; temperate.

saudha—a mansion ; a 'White Hall,' a marble building.

sāvitrī—a ray of light ; a celebrated verse (Gāyatri) of the *Ṛgveda.*

sīdhu—spirit distilled from molasses, rum.

śikhā—top ; tuft of hair on the top of head as a mark of an Ārya.

śikhara—a peak ; a top.

śīkṣaka—teacher ; a specialist in one's line.

śilpa—an art ; skill.

śiṣṭa—dregs ; educated, cultured.

ślōka—a praise in verse ; *anuṣṭubh.*

śmaśāna—cemetery.

snātaka—an initiated householder ; a graduate.

śoka—shock of grief ; depression.

sphaṭika—a crystal ; quart.

śrāddha—faithful ; 'obsequies' performed at various times.

śramaṇī—a female devotee or mendicant. *Bhikṣuṇī.*

śrauta—Vedic ritual.

śṛṅga—a mark ; a lotus.

śrotriya—Brāhmaṇa ; priest ; preceptor.

sthāna—proper vocal organs.

sthapati—a mason. Cf. *Vārdhaki*, *Takṣaka.*

stotra—a hymn of praise.

strī-dhana—a woman's private property over which she exercises control independent of her husband ; dowry.

strī-dharma—duty of a woman; *pātivratya.*

stūpa—a mound ; a Buddhistic tope.

sudhā—pure ; nectar.

surā—a spirituous liquor, wine.

sūtra—a precept or aphorism.

svādhyāya—sacred study.

svāgatam—welcome.

svara—Vedic accent; a Vedic tone.

svarga—heaven.

svarita—the third or mixed tone lying between the high and the low.

sva[ā]stika—a mystical mark.

svastyayana—benediction on a journey.

svayaṁvara—'marriage by choice;' self-choice.

takkola—a kind of fruit.

takṣaka—an architect; name of the Divine Architect (*tvaṣṭā*).

tamāla—name of a tree with a very dark bark; the palm-tree.

ṭaṅka—stone-piercing instrument; or a small weight.

tāra—high, deep, radiant.

tarpaṇa—'*jala--tarpara*' or presenting libations of water to the Manes of the deceased ancestors.

tapas—penance, self-purification.

tāpasa
tāpasī —a hermit, devotee, an ascetic.
tapasvī

tilaka—a mark of sandalwood paste on the forehead.

tisraḥ vidyāḥ—three kinds of knowledge in Indian philosophy.

tīrtha—a holy place.

tomara—an iron club.

toraṇa—a gateway.

trayī—the three Vedas taken collectively.

udātta—the acute accent.

udaremukha—a motif in art.

upādhyāya—a spiritual teacher.

upanayana—investiture with the sacred thread.

upaniṣad—a portion of the religious and philosophical literature of the Hindus.

uttarīya—an upper garment.

vadha—killing, murder, slaughter.

vaikhānasa—a *va[ā]naprastha*.

vaiśvadeva—an offering made to 'viśve-devaḥ.'

vaivāhikī—matrimonial.

vaivāhya—nuptial solemnity.

vaṁśāvali—a pedigree, genealogy.

vānara—a monkey; the Dravas in the Vindhyas.

vānaprastha—a Brāhmaṇa in the third stage of his religious life. Cf. *vaikhānasa*.

vardhakī—a carpenter.

varṇa—a class of caste.

varṇāśrama—the four castes and stages of life.

varṣa-śatam—a century, one hundred years.

vārtā—news; profession; agriculture.

vaśī—controlled; subdued, temperate.

vastra—garment; clothes.

vāstu—a house; *vāstu-śamana*—appeasing the spirit of a dwelling.

vāvātā—a king's favourite wife from a Śūdra (or the lowest) caste.

veda-vidyā-vrata-snāta—one who has finished his Vedic education in all departments.

vedāṅga—a branch of Vedic lore.

vedī—an altar.

vidhavā—a widow.

vidyā—learning.

vimāna—a heavenly car or air-ship.

vīṇā—the Indian lute.

vivāha—marriage.

vīraṇa—a desert; barren soil.

vivikta—solitary; pure; (a) seclusion.

vrata—a vow; a rite; an oath; devotion.

vṛnda—hundred thousand (1,00,000) millions.

yājaka—a sacrificing priest.

yajña—a sacrifice.

Yajurveda—text of the *Yajurveda* (or No. 2 of the sacred scriptures of the Hindu), or the body of the sacred *mantras* in prose muttered at a sacrifice.

yantra—any instrument or machine.

yantra-yuddha—mechanized warfare.

yauvarājya—the rank or rights of an heir-apparent.

yoga—union; contact; religious mediation.

yojana—a distance equal to eight miles.

yūpa—a sacrificial post.

yūtha—a herd; *yūthapa*—the leader of a herd.

yuvarāja—a crown-prince, heir-apparent.

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Zutshi, C. N. 3 (f. n.)

ERRATA

Some of the following mistakes are regretted, and I would solicit the reader's indulgence for correcting them as suggested below :

Page	*Line*	*For*	*Please read*
3	33	Priarn	Priam
4	16	Daśartha	Daśaratha
7	21	the	of the
9	2, 16	*Māhābharata*	*Mahābhārata*
9	22	*Arthaśastra*	*Arthaśāstra*
9	24	*aprayacchau*	*aprayacchan*
9	26	as	as of
10	42	*Mahābhārata*	*Mahābhārata.*[4]
11	3	*sarva...*	*sārva...*
11	14	Bhāratavarṣha	Bhāratavarṣa
15	43	were	was
17	17, 32	Gidhra	Gṛdhra
41	30	12)	12),
43	8	Yaksnī	Yakṣī
46	23	withness	litheness
46	37	*kapīām*	*kapīnām*
48	18	heals	heels
48	22	sown	town
48	41	assistange	assistance
51	18	attendants'	attendants
52	10	and	*to be omitted*
54	40	found	fond
56	33	menifest	manifest
65	26	*-bhaga*	*-bhāga*
71	11	waring	wearing
74	26	*vaṁśakaraḥ sutaḥ*	*vaṁśakarāḥ sutāḥ*
74	42	pro onged	prolonged
76	52	nepances	penances
81	21	havings	having
81	22	napped	snapped
81	22	onces	once
81	23	ent	sent
83	45	nogap	no gap

Page	*Line*	*For*	*Please read*
90	26	antagonism	antagonisms
93	5	passion sex urge	passion, sex-urge,
94	5	sooth	soothe
100	21	are	is
111	35	condemned	condemns
116	48	*vaidhvya*	*vaidhavya*
117	28	as	an
119	25	copartisans	cohorts
120	1	presences and clad	presence and decked
121	20	Entire	The entire
122	Fig. 34	Kedārāśvar	Kedāreśvara
123	3	,	;
124	15	servants, upon	servants upon
124	24	and with	with
124	25	ornament & noble	ornament, and of noble
124	30	nobility	nobles
127	2	demonness	demoness
129	6	‘it	“it
131	43	. ”	”—
132	50	gift	*to be omitted*
133	5	suspectst	suspectest
136	49	developed	devolved
138	Fig. 44	he	the
144	7	words	word
144	23	.	,
146	4	appasent	apparent
147	43	birds	bird
149	1	bringhtness	brightness
149	4	slacking	stackening
149	18	withinauspicious	with inauspicious
150	12	for	with
155	37	this	his
155	43	as	as in
159	7	goodly	good
159	34	conflicts—our	conflict—one
159	38	Parliaments	Parliament
164	46	as	at
168	29	studies.	studies,
170	38	sweets	sweet
174	33	his	this
177	31, 37	adopt-	adapt-

Page	*Line*	*For*	*Please read*
178	25	regard	regards
179	18	Rāvaṇa’,	Rāvaṇa”
186	Fig. 53	powess	prowess
186	Fig. 53	Javs	Java
188	9	aknowledge	acknowledge
189	24	, thus	thus
190	14	mind	minds
190	18	the	, the
190	41	this	the
190	42	thus	than
191	2	at	into
191	37	an	a
191	1 (f. n.)	Aesthics	Aesthetics
193	Fig. 55	Bharahu	Bharhut
194	18	on	in
195	22	on	of
195	35	singers	song
196	26	entices	enticers
197	37	-pitcheds inging	-pitched singing
198	37	palaces	places
200	34	set	lit
201	7	lotuses	lotuses,
201	10	for	far
204	12	promegranate	pomegranate
204	20	Bharate	Bharata
204	21	Dāsas wera	Dāśas were
206	23	r	,
220	Fig. 77	to let-ma d	toilet-maid
221	Fig. 78	Sidle-ocks	Side-locks
230	9	a this	at his
231	24	Aśokāvāṭikā	Aśokavāṭikā
238	47	*śiś ra*	*śiśira*
240	42	cow	cows
242	49	produce	products
244	39	minerology	mineralogy
247	19	give	gave
247	36	be	be said
249	22	*Kumdhakāra*	*Kumbhakāra*
252	1	whereven	wherever
257	48	progress,	progress.
259	18	vast	,vast

Page	*Line*	*For*	*Please read*
259	36	-peaks,	-peaks
259	46	Schlegel.	Schlegel,
261	37	palaces	places
262	26	forms	form
263	43	thr	the
282	2, 3 (f. n.)	*-pada*	*-pāda*
283	25	Rāma,	Rāma
285	27	Wheu	When
292	31	direct'	direct' "
292	Fig. 107	*c*,	*c*.
298	28	wasl oved	was loved
298	38	woman	women
306	Fig. 306	s,econd	second
310	1, 1 (f. n.)	*jālā-*	*jāla-*

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3/3/67

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